To
Rev. J. M. Ford,
from
The Sisters of Providence.

Feast of
The Presentation
1917.

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Sister Saint Francis Xavier
Irma Le Fer de la Motte

THE LIFE AND LETTERS

OF

SISTER ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

(Irma Le Fer de la Motte)

OF THE SISTERS OF PROVIDENCE

OF

SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS, INDIANA

BY

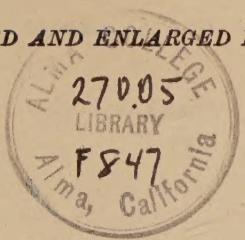
ONE OF HER SISTERS

Mme. Clémentine De La Corbinière

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

By The Sisters of Providence

REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION



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✠Joannes J. Glennon,
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FOREWORD

The apostolic fire burning in the heart of Sister Saint Francis Xavier furnished to her biographer the untranslatable title *"Une Femme Apôtre."* The spirit of the Twelve had so completely possessed her that no other term could accurately portray her; yet, in the present edition we have dropped the old French title through courtesy to the language, which gave so much in the chosen word and received so little from an alien tongue. Seldom does a work carry into a foreign dress the artistic niceties of the original, and we can not hope to have succeeded in producing the native charm of *"Une Femme Apôtre";* there is, however, an amount of hitherto unused material—letters and notes—that cannot fail to add new interest to the present work, and its opportuneness, when devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament is assuming an ever-increasing ardor, will be evident.

The Life of our saintly Sister was first published in France in 1879. By the time the English translation appeared in 1882, it had run through ten editions in the French, four in the German, and one in the Spanish. The English translation has long been out of print. As incessant demand has urged a reproduction, this revised and enlarged edition promises to be not less warmly welcomed than the former. Encouraged by this hope we send forth the little work on its mission of conquest, to the glory of God, always admirable in His Saints.

the sacrifice made by those who have chosen the better part; and will, we hope, fire the heart of many a young woman with the love of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and the longing to join the "thousands who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

JOSEPH CHARTRAND,
Bishop Coadjutor.

Indianapolis,
October 22, 1916.

INTRODUCTION TO THE REVISED ENGLISH TRANSLATION

In all sincerity I can say that the invitation to write an Introduction to the English translation of the Life and Letters of Sister Francis Xavier, Irma le Fer de la Motte, is an immense joy to me. I seize the occasion eagerly, for it gives expression to my veneration for a peculiarly gifted heroine of God's service. And, besides, I am hereby placed in affectionate relationship with a religious community whose praises are on the lips and in the hearts of so large a portion of Catholic Americans.

Sister Saint Francis Xavier, who was a child of benediction from her mother's womb, was chosen by God to be the trusted associate of the sainted Mother Theodore Guérin, the Foundress of the Sisterhood of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She ranks among the foremost of the pioneer religious of the Church in America, as well for the bright qualities of her noble nature as for her remarkable endowments of grace.

Born and reared in the sanctuary of a typical Christian family of Brittany, this elect soul enjoyed the earliest favors of that Providence whose very name was to be the proud title of her Community.

Irma's mother, worthy to be the Novice Mistress of saints, spoke of her child's First Communion as if it were her dedication to highest perfection. She wrote to a friend about her preparation of Irma for the sublime event:

"The child's father and I shed our tears upon the little one, sweet tears, the prelude of still sweeter ones. On that beautiful morning, what joy was mine while clothing my little Irma in her white garments, symbols of the innocence adorning her heart! What a moment for a Christian mother who beholds her child for the first time approaching the God of Angels!"—words like those of the angels of holy baptism; but they especially voice the feelings of a priest who officiates at the altar when young maidens are invested with the sacred habit of religion.

And the mother's holy anticipations were justified by the event, for a marked change was seen in Irma after her First Communion. I quote from the first letter of Irma printed by the author of the Life, addressed to another young girl, an effusion of childish love lighted up by the earlier gleams of that divine vocation destined to attract her to the American Apostolate. (The italics are mine.)

After describing the sweet air of devotion in her home, she says:

"You dread the seductions of the world. I thank God that He has inspired you with so great a fear of its dangers. It is thus we should feel and act. God cannot be placed in the balance with the world. *For Him we should be willing to leave country, family—all, even ourselves.*" How clearly did this happy little girl know the entire wisdom of life. Even so early did Irma feel that the only worth of existence is to know and love Jesus Christ; that the test of all excellence is the straight line drawn between time and eternity; that the principal subject of all thought, and aim of all conduct, is rightly to choose between the things of God and the things of the world.

It seems to have been a grace prevenient of reason's fuller activity—a sort of divine instinct—that inspired this young girl of an ideal Christian home to long to give it up, with all its parental love, all the love of brothers and sisters, in order to bury herself among savages in some remote wilderness. One cannot fix too early her calling to the apostolic life. And practically forecasting the future, she began in her young heart to arrange for her departure for the foreign missions. Vocation! That divine word had been spoken in the hidden depths of her soul, and she had hearkened to it gladly.

It was several years later that God spoke it to her outwardly by the lips of her spiritual adviser, the Jesuit Père Besnoin. "You will go to the foreign missions to convert little savages," he said to her, and his words sounded in the inner chamber of her soul, waking the echoes of heaven's earlier calling. Writing to a favorite of hers she said: "I saw a missionary from Indiana [Monseigneur de la Hailandière] walking in the garden with Abbé Cardonnet, and as I saluted them I learned that they had been talking about me—about my going to the Indiana mission. O my God, what a moment was this! What! to give up everything that I loved, and so suddenly! How shall I speak of this to my father, and to my mother! But let me tell you, dearest Elvire, that here at home I am happy, most happy, and yet for God, and only for God, do I give up everything. God!—oh! He, indeed, is worth a few tears, a few bruises of the heart."

We must pass over the interval elapsing between these preliminary movements of grace and her novitiate and profession in the Providence Sisterhood, founded some thirty years previously in the diocese of Le Mans, referring the reader to the detailed account of this in-

teresting period, as well as of the voyage to America, given in the Life.

When Sister Saint Francis Xavier joined her Sisters in Indiana in the early forties of the last century, that state had been admitted to the Union for more than a score of years. None the less that region was still a sylvan wilderness, its homes were log cabins—the cradles of a hardy stalwart race of citizens—its entire existence a warfare with the forest, hewing down its giant trees and burning them up, and then,—a most toilsome labor—breaking up the soil for a crop, a soil rich only in promise, and yielding the pioneer farmer and his wife and little ones but frugal subsistence. "We live in the woods," Sister Saint Francis Xavier wrote home, "where everything is chopping trees and clearing up new fields, sowing and reaping."

Like so many others of our first missionaries, the Sisters had come over seas to convert the children of the savage Indian tribes. But Providence so arranged that they were to establish schools to train the children of the white settlers—the Indians having been deported far to the westward:—"The Americans," she exclaims in a letter, "whose traits of character are so calm, so cold, so meditative." She marveled at them, and she loved them at first sight. She knew their defects, however, and with instantaneous readiness her apostolate directed all its energies to them, as they were scattered through a diocese embracing Indiana and Illinois, equal in area to the half of France. "In this whole wide diocese," she writes, "there is but one Catholic school."

No sooner had the Sisters arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods than vocations began to be added them from heaven in reward of their apostolic fervor. These were

noble-minded girls, children for the most part of the first Catholic settlers of the Great West. But even more precious gifts of Providence were vouchsafed in the reinforcements of new Sisters and Novices from the Old World; so that in not many years Saint Mary-of-the Woods, as the Mother House was appropriately called, became the center of a system of schools from primary grades up to the Academy diploma and, later, the College degree, established in almost all the cities and towns of that vast region. This enforced, of course, an immense activity in the outward apostolate, and it calls for a profound depth of piety for the sanctification of the souls of the Sisters; which is not so much a coördinate necessity for success in God's outward work, as it is the overmastering element in the making of the apostle. Sister Saint Francis Xavier's help was essential to both departments of the religious vocation. She was Mother Theodore's right hand. She was apt for every duty, willing for every humiliation, a fountain of sympathy in the many calamities that befell the first fifteen years of the Institute. She was always the premier counselor of both Superior and Sisters; a woman truly valiant and prudent. And in the spiritual life she was a pattern by which to plan and build the tabernacle of Christian and religious perfection. Naturally she is at the present day venerated as one of the saints of the order, her memory a sweet incense to heaven from every shrine of the community now become a widespread, powerful Sisterhood.

It is thus that she is manifested in this volume, made up principally of her letters. This feature makes the book almost an autobiography. Newman says that the only adequate story of any one's career is his letters. It is fortunate that so very many of those of Sister Saint

Francis Xavier were preserved. They exhibit her apostolate as vexed with every trial and surviving with not a single blemish. She was absolutely devoted to her divinely appointed task. In educational work she was true to Christ's ideal of forming human character, unflinchingly true, and she shared the triumphant success that heaven vouchsafed her order.

Meanwhile she was just as steadfastly true to Christ's ideal of personal perfection, namely, the practice of the maxims of the gospel with hearty earnestness. Her desire of perfection was a constant growth from the living root of divine love planted in her soul in childhood; a frame of mind which, says the Founder of the Paulist community—echoing all spiritual teachers—is "the backbone of every religious order."

Sister Saint Francis Xavier was called away to her divine Spouse prematurely;—so it seemed to human judgment. She had scarcely completed her fortieth year when her health, never strong, showed a weakness that alarmed her Sisters. But this failing of her bodily strength imparted to her spirit a strength of resignation to the divine will not felt before. It was the autumnal breath of God ripening all the fruits of virtue upon the tree He had planted in the beginning.

When near the end Sister Saint Francis seems to have claimed a place among the ascending and descending angels on the patriarch's ladder between earth and heaven. Back and forth went her prayers, adoring Jesus Christ on the altar and the Blessed Trinity in the highest heavens, and again offering her life and its dearest treasures of love for her Sisters and their apostolate. In the last months of her life she seemed fascinated with thoughts of the future stretching out before

the community she loved so well, and which was then beginning to open with more generous vistas of growth and usefulness. The following prayer was penned by her, the dictate of truest apostolic zeal, when she was on the threshold of eternity, as if waving farewell to the earth and her loved ones. It is called by her Sisters her PRAYER FOR INDIANA.

"Remember, O Lord, this land of Indiana, which Thou didst possess from the beginning, of which Thou thoughtest from all eternity, which Thou heldest in Thy almighty hand when Thou didst create the world, and which was hidden in Thy adorable heart when, dying on the cross, Thou didst confide its poor inhabitants to the care of Thy divine Mother.

"O Lord, remember Indiana. Say but the word and all here shall be made children of Abraham. Send good laborers into this Thy vineyard, holy missionaries who will have no interests other than Thine own, men according to Thy heart, and true servants of Mary, Thy holy Mother.

"They will defend Thy glory, they will publish Thy name, they will save souls that have cost Thee Thy precious blood. Visit us by Thy power and in Thy mercy. These favors we ask by the intercession of our holy patrons, Saint Joseph and Saint Francis Xavier. Amen."

Does not this prayer forecast many a conversion to the true faith?

And now it remains for us only to bid the reader to measure his steps through this book with deliberation, for its every page holds lessons of virtue taught with living insistence. It is especially full of the missionary spirit. Its chapters are as interesting as any novel; they ever tell of happenings of deep religious import,

and not seldom bordering on the miraculous. The book edifies and instructs from cover to cover—a memorable book. It is the graphic exhibit of an interior life of a spirit belonging to the higher, nobler quality of our humanity; and at the same time it is the chronicle of a life of unwearied activity, always squared to the principles of religion and the rules of enlightened reason. It is the autobiography of an heroic soul, made up of letters written with exquisite spirit and sentiment, as well as uttered with most artless candor, every letter that of soul speaking to soul through the transparent medium of closest love; a history that has the charm of interior revelation amid an outward environment of men and events which are now, and which must ever remain, of prime interest to Catholic Americans. Whatever good we at present have in the Church in the United States, we owe principally to the Catholic men and women of a past generation. Of them this great-souled Sister was a type. And whatsoever we hope to achieve for God at a future day, shall be ours only in proportion to our fidelity to that type. And this is especially true in the supremely important matter of education.

WALTER ELLIOTT, C.S.P.

LETTER OF THE RIGHT REVEREND JAMES O'CONNOR,

BISHOP OF OMAHA,

Dear Sister:

Many thanks for the "Life and Letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier," which I received on Saturday. I have read it with very deep interest, and I hope, not without profit. One thing is certain, it has made me feel very cheap and mean in my own eyes. I never read such letters as Irma's, so natural, so exquisite in style, so full of the spirit of God. What a perfect soul they reveal!—perfect in natural gifts, but especially so in the gifts of divine grace. God did not bestow on her the gift of miracles, he did not invite her to the practice of extraordinary austerities, but he developed in her all the sweet and gentle virtues that go to make a saint. Yet, in reading her life, one is made to feel that behind that extraordinary perfection in her daily actions, there was a reserved force that would have enabled her to remove mountains, had it been necessary to do so. God would have refused nothing to one of her faith and holiness of life.

Blessed, indeed, is the place that holds the relics of such a servant of God, but still more blessed in having been consecrated by her labors and her prayers! The fragrance of her virtues, and the influence of her example will long be felt at Saint Mary's, and her prayers will send down many a grace on its inmates. When I visited you, two years ago, I was sensibly impressed by

the religious atmosphere of the place. I thought I saw in many of your members evidences of a higher order of piety. I was at a loss to account for this, at the time, not knowing how they could have enjoyed any exceptional advantages of training or directors. But, now, it is all plain to me. "What a man sows, that shall he reap." I saw the harvest, but till I read of Mother Theodore, and Sister Xavier, and their companions, I did not know the sort of seed that had been cast into the furrow. May God bless you all, and keep you long in the spirit that animated those pure and generous souls!

Truly yours in Dno,

JAMES O'CONNOR.

Omaha,
June 12, 1882.

DEDICATION

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND FRANCIS SILAS CHATARD,

BISHOP OF VINCENNES,[1] INDIANA

Monseigneur:

The life story of a daughter of Brittany, who was also a religious of your diocese, is told in these pages. Like a gentle flower she was transplanted from the lovely borders of the Rance to the forests of the New World, there to exhale her perfume, to fructify, and to pass away, leaving behind her the remembrance of her sanctity.

I trust that inexperienced hands have not robbed the writings of Sister Saint Francis Xavier of any of their original freshness, and that the sentiments of love and confidence in Divine Providence with which her soul overflowed have been preserved in all their vigor, and will find an echo in the soul of the reader. May the approbation I hope for from the Prelate who illustrates by his virtues and his talents the see of Bruté and Hailandière, of Bazin and Saint Palais, draw down upon this humble work the success which I desire only for the greater glory of God.

Prostrate at your feet, the author, as the humblest of the servants of the Church and its Princes, begs your benediction upon her labors.

CLÉMENTINE DE LA CORBINIÈRE,
(*née* LE FER DE LA MOTTE).

[1] The See of Vincennes was transferred to Indianapolis in the year 1898.

REPLY OF
THE RIGHT REVEREND BISHOP
FRANCIS SILAS CHATARD
TO
MADAME DE LA CORBINIÈRE

Madame:

Please to accept my thanks for the dedication of your book, entitled "The Life of Sister Saint Francis Xavier," with which you have honored me.

This act on your part is all the more pleasing to me, because I have often heard of the exemplary virtues of this religious, and of the good she accomplished in my diocese.

I am convinced that the perusal of her life and deeds will not fail to produce a good effect, and to enkindle the fire of divine love in the souls of those whom God may call to follow her; and it will also serve to edify the faithful in general.

Believe me, Madame, with the greatest respect,

Your faithful servant in Christ,

FRANCIS SILAS,
Bishop of Vincennes.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION

It is an honor for me to write some lines of introduction to this book, not one page of which was written with a view to publicity, and in accepting the honor I perform an act of gratitude.

It is now nearly forty years since I first heard the name of Sister Saint Francis Xavier. It was at Tours. A lady of great intelligence and of rare virtues, the Baroness de la Valette—who, when I was far from my family, had received me with real kindness and Christian and maternal cordiality—asked me one day to call on her, as she expected an American religious whose history, she thought, would interest me. I gladly accepted her kind invitation, and there found Mother Theodore Guérin, who was then in France soliciting aid for her convent at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, which had been founded in the diocese of Vincennes only a few years before, and which had recently sustained a heavy loss by fire.

Without giving details of this meeting, I shall only say that the first pious book I published was a little sketch of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, written under the inspiration of Mother Theodore's recital and almost in her own words. The marked and, I may add, the permanent success of my first modest publication, the fruit which it has borne, and the warm affection which the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods have always manifested for me, besides the help and support which their prayers have afforded me in all circumstances, have en-

couraged me to dedicate my pen to record the contests and victories of some great souls who loved God and served the Church.

Irma le Fer de la Motte was one of these heroines. She was a young lady of rare attractions, the grandniece or, according to the custom of Brittany, great-grandniece of Madame la Baronne de la Valette. The domestic life which she describes in her writings is most interesting. It is the life of a Christian household of true nobility, a household governed and sustained by a wise rule of life, and above all by the union and virtues of the members of the family. Irma makes them all known to us with their little faults and their amiable qualities.

Monsieur and Madame Charles le Fer de la Motte, Irma's parents, persons of merit and highly respected, lived at Saint Servan, at a place called Fours-à-Chaux. The little town of Saint Servan spreads out into the surrounding country, the houses being situated in the midst of gardens and fields. The property of Monsieur Charles le Fer de la Motte reaches nearly to the Rance, which it overlooks. Here the river forms a small bay, which the tide enters twice daily. It is frequented by fishermen, and near it are found limekilns, which give the name to the locality. The sea, the vast sea, is so near that it can be seen from the windows of Irma's dwelling. At some distance, and southeast of the Rance, is the homestead of Lorette, which owes its name to the Chapel of Our Blessed Lady situated in the domain and on the road leading from Rennes and Dinan to Saint Malo. Irma's grandmother, the mother of Monsieur Charles le Fer de la Motte, lived at Lorette, with her three daughters and her youngest son, Henri de la Motte. Her two eldest daughters were not mar-

ried; the third was a widow and had three children. Monsieur Henri had six. The two families of Lorette and Fours-à-Chaux could thus furnish a reunion of thirty souls, of whom twenty-one were grandchildren of the dowager of Lorette. They were quite a colony, and their number was increased by cousins of both sexes, whose names will be found in the correspondence, and who either lived near or came from time to time to pass some weeks at these hospitable homes. There were neighbors also. Saint Servan had in its vicinity a number of families who held the same principles and lived the same sort of life as the family of Monsieur le Fer. The children played from one garden to another, their lives made joyous by a commingling of wise discipline and happy liberty. At Lorette the domestic chaplain, Abbé Cardonnet, was both the friend of the family and the instructor of the little children. Irma placed herself under his direction, and received from him special light and great help in the choice of her missionary career.

But we must not forget the grandmother at Fours-à-Chaux (Madame le Fer's mother), Madame de Ginguené, the widow of one of the victims of Quiberon. She reserved for herself the charge of teaching the children sacred history, and she also inspired them with a love for the poor and a solicitude for souls. She herself served as an example on these points to all the devout people around. Her desires, her alms, and her efforts were all directed towards the erection of a convent of religious women at Saint Servan. At last she had the happiness of seeing there an establishment of the Sisters of Providence, of the community of Ruillé-sur-Loir. She did not then suspect that her little Irma would later find her way to America through this same Ruillé.

The revolution of 1830 deprived Irma's family of a great portion of their income, and imposed sacrifices on each member. All were obliged to become useful in some way. The elder children assumed the care of the younger, in place of the servants who had to be dismissed. Irma's part was the education of her younger brothers and sisters. The poor, who had already been blessed by her instruction, could bear testimony to the special aptitude she manifested for this arduous duty. She studied Latin, in order to keep her brothers longer under the parental roof and thus shorten the time of their collegiate course. But her application was so great that it had to be moderated. She spent herself in her classes, as well as in her works of charity, and even allowed herself to be so carried away by her enthusiasm that the regularity of her home life became irksome to her. She had an innate horror of order and once composed and sustained a thesis on the inconveniences of a regular life. The requirement of eating, retiring, and rising at fixed hours was burdensome to her. She wished to follow her fancies and ideas without restraint —to shorten the repast, to prolong the day, to curtail the hours of sleep; in fact she had such a distaste for real life that her health became visibly impaired.

That God directs all things is clearly manifest from the sequel. Irma's debilitated state induced Madame le Fer to send her away from Fours-à-Chaux. But she was not sent far. She was placed at Lorette, and one of her aunts set about to cure her of her excessive enthusiasm. The true remedy was now providentially found. Abbé Cardonnet, while giving her lessons in Latin, undertook her spiritual direction also, and initiated her gently and solidly into the practice of Christian perfection.

The religious life was no part of Irma's early plans. She was full of zeal and ardor, but tenacious of her independence; and though she wished to travel to distant lands to help souls deprived of the light of faith, she had no idea of doing this under rule. Her intention was to devote herself to the foreign missions, to teach school, to dedicate herself to the service of the sick—in a word, to give up her whole being to do it as she pleased, more freely even than when she lived in the bosom of her family.

In the neighborhood of Fours-à-Chaux and of Lorette, apostolic work was already going on. When but a child Irma entered into it, and aided much in sustaining and developing it. Catechism was taught, societies were organized, and among the poor the devotion of the Month of Mary was established. While Irma was engaged in these works, the "Nouvelles Reçues des Missions," the original title of the "Annals of the Propagation of the Faith," gave strange accounts of America. Cannibals were reported to be among the flocks of the newly-erected dioceses. Vincennes, which was to be the realization of Irma's dreams, was only a post in the midst of a savage people, who retained an exalted idea of the pioneer Catholic missionaries, and refused to receive among them any Protestant ministers. "We know from our ancestors," they said, "that the ministers of the Great Spirit wear black gowns and do not marry." The Annals recounted also the emigration of the Indians, many of whom were Catholics, driven from their homes by the government. Brittany had a share in the work of the apostolate. The saintly Simon Bruté, first Bishop of Vincennes, was a native of Rennes. Among the priests who accompanied him from Brittany was the seraphic Benjamin Petit, whose life

was devoted to the conversion of the Indians, and whose death was caused by the hardships he underwent in accompanying one of the expelled Indian tribes from Lake Michigan to the borders of the Mississippi.

The account of this admirable Christian and apostolic Odyssey could not but inflame Irma's heart. Yet the idea of becoming a religious did not enter her mind. She had not failed to notice that Father Petit in his narrative mentioned the assistance which an old French lady afforded him in instructing his neophytes. Irma was young and did not aspire to any other state of life. Devotedness and freedom were her only ambition.

Even before the appearance of these Annals, Saint Servan had been visited by a missionary for the purpose of collecting alms. It was at this time, in the year 1834, that the desire of being employed in the foreign missions sprang up in Irma's heart. She kept the secret to herself, however, divulging it to no one except her director, Abbé Cardonnet, who acted with prudence, neither deciding for nor against it. Five years later, in 1839, a Breton neighbor and friend of the Le Fer family, Monseigneur de la Hailandière, who had accompanied Bishop Bruté to America, and who afterwards became his successor in the diocese of Vincennes, visited France. Irma spoke to him of her desire. After consulting Abbé Cardonnet the bishop decided on its immediate accomplishment.

It only remains for me to say how Providence, in accepting this sacrifice of Irma and her family, wished to crown it in elevating it; how God permitted obstacles to the immediate realization of the project to which He inclined the heart that desired to devote itself to His service while dispensing with the humility, obedience,

and self-denial of the religious life. Providence conducts sweetly.

We shall not enter into details of the joys, the labors, the disasters, nor the triumphs of our Sister in Indiana. The book, full of interest and charm, is before the reader. I shall only add a reflection on the happiness of parents who generously give their children to God. Irma was the crown, the glory of her father and mother. Although separated from them, she was far from being lost to Lorette and Fours-à-Chaux. The closest intimacy was kept up between Saint Servan and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. From Indiana flowed a stream of delight and tenderness to the dwellers on the border of the Rance. The orphans of Vincennes and Terre Haute were the adopted children of Monsieur and Madame le Fer. The friends of Saint Servan from time to time sent them presents, and were interested in all that concerned them. The new community of Indiana and its admirable superior, Mother Theodore Guérin, were henceforth a part of the Le Fer family; and, by an interchange of prayers and letters, their souls were always in unison. The wealth of parental hearts was poured out on those who, responding to the call of God, had coöperated so energetically and tenderly in the sacrifice of their child. Irma, by her thoughts, her prayers, and her affection, remained loving and charming in the midst of her family; she gave them counsel and was interested in their progress; she instructed and directed her younger sisters and brothers, and she kept for the good of those souls allied to her by the ties of nature, that solicitude which was the prelude and, perhaps, the germ of her noble and sublime vocation. Thus she belonged to God, to her community, and also to her family.

This family, which has given two of its members to the arduous and sublime work of the Mission, where they have labored so zealously and with so much fruit, is proposed to the reader as an object of edification. Virtue, devotedness, the beauty of the religious life, are so gracefully depicted in the letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier that in reading them we are convinced that her wit, of which she so charmingly deplores the loss, was not killed at Ruillé. It sprang up stronger, more sprightly, more amiable and lovely. As her heart, bruised and broken in accomplishing the will of God, remained towards her family even more affectionate and cordial than ever it had been, so her mind, in despoiling itself by humility of all pretensions to brilliancy, aiming at simplicity and truth only, became still more beautiful and charming. It may be that my long standing affection and respect have overruled my judgment, but it seems to me that her correspondence, so instructive and delightful, is of incomparable worth and interest.

The letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier have, moreover, a literary value. They are exquisite and ought to endure. I believe that the book once read will be read again, that it will find its place on the shelves of the library where correct minds and delicate hearts place their best friends—those whom they wish to be near, to whom they love to talk, and of whom they seek counsel and elevation of mind in moments of perplexity and weariness.

LÉON AUBINEAU.

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LIFE AND LETTERS OF SISTER SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

(Irma le Fer de la Motte)

PART ONE—FRANCE

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD—FIRST COMMUNION

IT was while the Church was celebrating the feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord, that Irma le Fer de la Motte came into the world. She was born at Saint Servan in Catholic Brittany, April 15, 1816. If, as some maintain, God grants special graces to large families, that of Monsieur and Madame le Fer was certainly entitled to the blessings of Almighty God, for it consisted of twelve children,[1] six sons and six daughters, of whom Irma was the fourth. Could her parents have foreseen on the day of her birth the many gifts and graces God would one day bestow upon her, they would have joined with still greater ardor of soul in the sacred chant of the Church, *Gaudeamus. Alleluia!*

And what favor more precious could God have be-

[1] Eugene, the eldest of the family (died, 1877); Charles, captain in the navy (died, 1878); Pépa, who was but fourteen months older than Irma (died, 1858); Irma, whose life we are writing (died, 1856); Henri, commissary in the navy; Alphonse, a priest (died, 1868); Cécile; Eugénie; Elvire, known later as Sister Mary Joseph, a Sister of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods (died, 1881); Paul (died, 1858); Clémentine, Irma's godchild; and Louis, the youngest of the twelve.

stowed upon this child than to confide her to a truly Christian family? They hastened to take her to the church, and when she returned adorned with the grace of holy baptism, how lovingly she was received by her mother, whose children were doubly dear to her after becoming the children of God. It was the pious custom of Madame le Fer to place her sons and daughters under the protection of the Blessed Virgin by giving her name to each in baptism; Irma was the only one who really bore the name, however, the word Irma being an old form of Marie.

The first years of Irma's life present nothing remarkable. Like many children she was capricious and willful. Sometimes her father, whose business and official duties kept him in the city during the day, was obliged upon his return in the evening to punish Irma for refractory conduct. Madame le Fer generally took upon herself the painful task of punishing, in order that her husband after his daily labors, might find only enjoyment in the presence and caresses of his children; in exceptional cases, however, the authority of the father was deemed necessary, and, as it was seldom required, it was more efficacious in its effects.

One day Irma, in a moment of anger having struck the nurse, her uncle, an officer of the Royal Guards, suddenly entered the room, and made her blush by showing her the littleness and cowardice of striking a person who was powerless to defend herself. He then prevailed upon her, though only after long insistence, to ask forgiveness of the servant. This wise and severe reprimand made so salutary and lasting an impression upon Irma, that henceforth there was never an occasion to reprove her for such outbursts of passion.

Irma considered herself pretty—as, in fact, she was—

and she loved to linger before a mirror admiring herself. Her nurse having told her that vain little girls who often look at themselves in a glass would finally end by seeing the devil in it, Irma one day spent several successive hours gazing in a mirror and calling up his satanic majesty. She used to say that she did this, not from the desire of seeing the devil but of frightening one of her sisters who, shocked at her audacity, was prostrate in prayer, pleading fervently for her conversion.

The same sister having been stricken with a lingering and painful nervous malady, Irma became her constant and devoted companion. She was obliged to perform her task with great sweetness and amiability and to avoid contradicting her in anything. At first she applied herself to this duty through the promise of a very small recompense, but, afterwards, for the love of God. In later years Irma wrote: "During Pepa's illness I overcame my temper for two cents a week, which was truly very cheap; but now I offer this impressionable character to Our Lord, that He may employ it for His glory." It can be said that after Irma's experience with her afflicted sister there were no further passionate outbreaks; but her obstinacy, impatience, and capriciousness gave place to a warmth of imagination and a vivacity of manner which became for her a source of keen suffering and frequent combats.

Irma's grandmother, Madame de Ginguené,[1] lived with her daughter, Madame le Fer de la Motte, at Fours-à-Chaux. She was aged by sorrow rather than by years. A few months after her marriage in 1790, Monsieur de Ginguené, captain of a regiment from Picardy, was compelled to leave her in order to defend his God and his king. He belonged to the body of

[1] Madame de Ginguené was the daughter of Monsieur Talhouët de Brignac.

troops that entered Quiberon, and was one of those whom the Republicans in 1793 treacherously shot, after having promised them life.

When Madame de Ginguené received a lock of his hair, his portrait painted for her while he was in prison, and a letter conveying his last adieus, her grief was indescribable. She was roused from this prostrating sorrow only by thoughts of such hatred and revenge that she almost wished to kill with her own hand those who had decreed the death of her husband. Her faith and love of God, however, sustained her in the violence of trial, and enabled her to pardon those by whom she had been so greatly injured.

She had one child, a daughter, on whom she lavished all her love and tenderness. Over her cradle Madame de Ginguené gave vent to her grief in floods of tears; but soon even this consolation was to be taken from her. The widow of a royalist could not escape suspicion. She was torn from her child, dragged to prison, and condemned to death without trial. The 9th Thermidor, however, saved her, and after an imprisonment of ten months, she was freed, though her health was entirely wrecked by the sufferings she had undergone. With a broken heart and no desire for a second marriage, she devoted the remainder of her life to the education of her daughter and the care of the poor. It was from her that Irma received her first lessons in Christian charity.

Madame de Ginguené loved to associate her little granddaughters with her in her good works, and to have them bestow the alms and clothing which she distributed among the unfortunate. Sometimes, as a reward for good behavior, she permitted them to accompany her in her visits to the sick. She also appointed them to preside at the weekly apportionment of work to poor

women. The children having the best record of conduct were privileged to collect the alms at the meetings of the Ladies of Charity which were held at her house.

As there were no religious at Saint Servan during Irma's childhood to take care of the sick in their own homes, a number of devoted ladies banded together with Madame de Ginguené as directress, and divided among themselves the different quarters of the city, where they visited the sick and needy. But the poor being numerous, many of the pious ladies succumbed under this self-imposed task, and Madame de Ginguené, whilst sustaining and encouraging them, took active measures to procure some religious who would relieve them of their charge. A short time before her death she had the consolation of seeing four Sisters of Providence established at Saint Servan. Little did she think that Irma would one day become a member of this community.

Madame de Ginguené also taught her grandchildren sacred history, and when, during the winter hours, they would group around her beside the fire and ask her to tell them a pretty story, she would reply, "My children, I will tell you a story which will be very beautiful, for it will be true"; and the children would listen with rapt attention to the admirable and touching stories of the Old Testament, which she so well knew how to arrange and adapt to their youthful minds. Irma, more than any of her brothers and sisters, retained the impression of these first lessons. The Holy Scriptures were always her delight, and when in after years the education of her brothers was entrusted to her, it was a great happiness to make them study and love the Sacred Writings.

Irma attended school but for a short time. She was

sent to an old maiden lady who received as students both French Catholics and English Protestants. It is not easy to realize how greatly excited the young people became over their religious differences. They passed the hours of recreation, and also the time which should have been devoted to study, in controversy. Irma, although the youngest, was not the least zealous. She had become much attached to a charming young English lady, several years her senior, who had given her many proofs of affection. She ardently desired the conversion of Miss Matilda C——, and to this end she alternately employed prayers, caresses, and the arguments of the catechism. Although it was not the moment for grace to speak to the heart of Matilda, the germ of that zeal which Irma in after life exercised in behalf of souls could already be discerned.

The time of Irma's First Holy Communion was approaching, and Madame le Fer, like all good Christian mothers, prepared her with the greatest possible care for this sublime action. A short time before the day fixed for this important act of her life Irma was taken seriously ill, and it was feared her happiness would have to be postponed. God, however, heard her prayers and those of her family, and she recovered sufficiently even to make the preparatory retreat.

In speaking of her daughter's First Communion, Madame le Fer wrote:

With what happiness I presented her to her venerable grandparents to receive their blessing! Her father and I added ours, while shedding sweet tears, the prelude of still sweeter ones. On that beautiful morning, what joy was mine while clothing my little Irma in her white garments, symbols of the innocence adorning her heart! What tender kisses the family pressed upon her lovely

young face, sweet mirror of the sentiments of her pure soul! Oh! what a moment for a Christian mother who beholds her child for the first time approaching the God of angels! She forgets all the pain it has cost her.

We have thus offered all our children to the Lord, and the joy of so doing is ever new and undiminished, because each child God sends us is as dear as the preceding ones. For all there are smiles and caresses. Parental affection is a reflex of divine love, borrowing from it this privilege, that, though divided, it is not lessened. The Benjamin of a large family is cherished like an Isaac, and the offering of him to the Lord procures for the parents new merits and new joys.

Thanks, my God, thanks for all! Each one has given us on this day the same consolation. We remember with tenderness their pious disquiets of conscience, their tears in coming from the sacred tribunal of penance, their innocent and pure joy of heart. One of them could not sleep on the eve of this great day, fearing to die before receiving our divine Lord. And happy changes have taken place in the character of our dear children, whose future sometimes had caused us great anxiety. The faults which once alarmed us have given way to virtues that God has caused to take root in their young hearts.

The second time Irma received Holy Communion, she appreciated her happiness more fully. She was more deeply penetrated with the wondrous graces Jesus bestowed on her in the Holy Eucharist, towards which, as we shall see, she ever after had a special attraction. A marked change now took place in her character. Her heart seemed filled with piety towards God, and kindness and affection for her family. There was also a rapid transition from childhood to maturity.

Before completing her thirteenth year she experienced much happiness in being chosen the godmother of her little sister Clementine. To have the older members

of the family become sponsors for the younger is a sure means of strengthening the bonds of affection uniting brothers and sisters. Irma was so happy and proud because of the honor conferred upon her, that no eleventh child of a family could have been more joyfully greeted than this one was. Referring to the occasion, Irma wrote:

Once I was very happy. I was thirteen years old and was chosen to be godmother. I was told that I had a little sister. I leaped for joy. I rushed to the window and placed there a pretty white flag, so that my cousin Henri could see it from afar and know my happiness. As he was selected to be godfather, he brought me a superb basket of fruit. This was certainly very kind and generous. He gave me his arm to escort me to church, and on the way we chatted together and formed plans for the education of our godchild. On approaching the church, however, our thoughts took a more serious turn, and, notwithstanding my youth, I offered my little Clementine to God, praying Him to take her after her baptism rather than permit her to tarnish the purity of her beautiful white robe. She cried so during the ceremony that I feared God was going to take her from me that very first day of her entrance into the world. Oh! strange life of ours, miserable life, which begins and ends with tears.

CHAPTER II

YOUTH—VICISSITUDES—NEW DUTIES—HOME-LIFE

THE revolution of July, 1830, was a time of trial to Irma's family. The new government suppressed the pensions hitherto obtained by her mother and grandmother, the one as daughter, the other as widow of one of the refugees massacred at Quiberon. Monsieur le Fer de la Motte, having refused to take an oath which he considered contrary to his conscience, lost his position. It was necessary in consequence to reduce expenses. The elder daughters were obliged to supply the places of the maids, whom the family could no longer retain. Irma, who had no aptitude either for sewing or for household duties, was charged with the care of her little goddaughter, and was also made the teacher of her younger brothers. She was well qualified for her new position. Her natural attraction for study rendered the task of instructing easy and pleasant, and she gave herself to it devotedly, enthusiastically, sacrificing in favor of her young pupils her taste, or rather her passion, for study and writing. She was an excellent preceptress, but a poor disciplinarian; while giving a lesson to one pupil she would become so engrossed as not to notice the others escaping into the garden to have a good time. To be able to understand the Office of the Church, and also to make herself more useful to her brothers, she studied Latin; and this with such eagerness that her master was often obliged to moderate her ardor.

Referring to this period of their family life, Irma

wrote to Mademoiselle Marie le M——, one of her young friends living at Rennes:

You have not dared to visit us, because you dread the seductions of the world. I thank God that He has inspired you with so great a fear of its dangers that you are even ready to sacrifice the pleasure of ever seeing me again. It is thus we should act. God cannot be placed in the balance with the world. For Him we should be willing to leave country, family, all, and ourselves. But in approving your sentiments I am happy to say you may come without fear. You are mistaken in thinking we lead a worldly life; our home is even called a convent, and no gossip from the outside world reaches us; we are often ridiculed for our simplicity. You may object to our large family. It is true we are many, and during vacation there is a great deal of noise. The children laugh, play, and scream in their amusements. This may make the head ache, but it does not trouble the heart. Our friends are very pious; my father's family is exemplary. Every morning we all—father, mother, children and servants assist at Mass; in the afternoon we sing hymns and say the beads; toward evening we often go to the church to pray for half an hour; before supper we have some pious reading, and before retiring we recite evening prayers in common. Such is the interior of a home that you believe dangerous!

When we meet next year I think you will be delighted with us. Perhaps you smile at my simplicity. No matter. I am sure you will be charmed by intimate association with people who think as you do, and who frankly exchange their thoughts. I am so happy in my family that it seems to me any one would regret leaving it.

The house in which Irma so sweetly passed her youth is situated on a hillside bordering the Rance, and commands a distant view of the English Channel. The site is delightful. The river makes capricious bends,

and its tranquil waters, like a faithful mirror, reflect the clouds in their various forms and colors. The silvery moon, in calm summer evenings, lends its gentle rays, replacing with mild light the rosy hues of the setting sun as it sinks beneath the waters. Many travelers have sung the praises of the Rance, but its charms were enjoyed by none more than Irma. She loved its mysterious murmurs, and listened with delight to the rippling of the waves as their sparkling and snowy foam dashed lightly against the rocks along its banks. Sometimes as she heard the distant fury of the raging ocean, she would reflect, "What a contrast between the smiling azure waters of the Rance and the sublimity and depth of the vast sea! Is not this an image of life, which at the beginning presents to our view a cradle surrounded by flowers and smiles, and at the close, a tomb where the deep voice of death will call us into eternity?"

Since the impressions which the senses receive have much to do in forming the heart, it is not astonishing that the imagination of this young girl was stamped with the seal of a poetic and religious melancholy. Scenes of nature elevated her soul to God and inspired her with the pious thoughts everywhere found in her letters.

The lovely environment of Saint Servan had for her a thousand attractions. When the weather was pleasant, the family and friends took long walks. Irma, observant and recollected, silently enjoyed the landscape unfolding itself before her. The fields of golden grain, enameled with the brilliant colors of cornflowers, Easter daisies, and poppies; the sprays of wayside moss; the insects, concealed under bushes laden with opening roses; the vivifying heat, the songs of the birds, the rustling of the leaves, and the murmur of the waters, ravished her virginal heart and caused a new life to stir

within it. Irma's expansive and grateful nature would call on intelligent creatures to join in praising the Author of these wonders. Addressing her companions she would say: "Aid me to bless Jesus; my voice is too weak, my heart too little. Let us unite, for drops of water form the rivers, grains compose the sheaves, voices give harmony, stars make the beauty of the firmament, souls are the delight of Jesus, and Jesus is the Word, who sends His light and His divine sweetness through the transparency of creation."

The days spent in the country, the walks in summer, and the evening reunions with the neighboring families were not Irma's only diversions. The holy patrons of the fathers and mothers of the family were joyously feasted. Saint Joseph's Day had, above all other days of the year, its peculiar solemnity. Madame le Fer de la Motte, Irma's grandmother, who was born in Spain, bore the name of Pepa, a Spanish abbreviation of Joseph. On the 19th of March the children and grandchildren assembled at Lorette[1] to celebrate the feast of her great patron. All responded with joy to the call, and each offered flowers to the dear grandmother. The older ones added needlework made for the occasion. Irma's piece was never finished, but she presented the part begun, concealing the other under the flowers, very certain that on so joyous a day she would escape reproach.

For the younger members of the joyous band, the dinner which was more elaborate than usual, and the bounty of the dear grandmother, constituted the best part of the day; but Madame de la Motte's greatest pleasure came from the verses sung in her honor

[1] Lorette was the name of the home of the elder Madame le Fer. The beautiful estate of Lorette is situated on the Rennes highway about three quarters of a mile from Saint Servan.

by her grandchildren. One year they sang the following:

This happy day, loved Grandmamma,
We've all assembled here
To celebrate our yearly feast,
To us so very dear.

You are a great protecting tree,
We, like young tender vines;
And round you, dearest grandmamma,
Each growing tendril twines.

Beneath your sweet maternal shade
We daily shall grow strong,
By you we shall be sheltered
From storms however long.

Our parents by your kindly aid,
Have drawn from Wisdom's fount,
Which gave to them fresh vigor
To climb Perfection's mount.

We, branchlets of those blessed vines,
Shall by our actions tell
From age to age the virtues
You practiced here so well.

Certainly the rules of versification were not rigorously observed, nor were the voices always harmonious; but as the tender sentiments expressed by cherished children never fail to find an echo in the hearts of mothers, the good grandmamma listened to these stanzas with much emotion. After the mirthful band had run off to play in the garden she asked her son Henri,[1] the poet of the family, to compose a response for her dear children. He immediately improvised some lines, which she sang on their return as well as her eighty years would permit.

Your tender, sweet attention
My old age charms and cheers;
The presence of my children
Makes me forget my years.

1 Monsieur Henri, later officer of the Royal Guards, was ordinarily called Henri de la Motte to distinguish him from his older brother Charles, who was simply called Le Fer.

May God reward you sweetly
For all your love, I pray!
I would this feast so happy
Could recommence each day.

Once or twice every week the children of Monsieur Charles le Fer took the large drawing-room of Lorette by storm. The younger ones, after hastily embracing their aunts and cousins, would immediately gather round their grandmamma and ask her, with all the simplicity of their age, to amuse them; then the good old grandmother, taking off her spectacles and touching her eyes, would say, "My children, have you ever seen eyes ninety years old?" "Oh! no, grandmamma." "Well, look at mine." (And what affection and gayety in those eyes!) Then she would pass to her nose and to her mouth; after that she would search her pockets and show a thimble, a pair of scissors, and a needlecase of antiquated style; and finally, to end the sport, she would put into the hand of each a little piece of money, and then the children would go away satisfied. In this drawing-room on New Year's Day, the gifts were always distributed. The children formed a circle around the large table, on which the grandmamma and their three aunts[1] displayed sugar-plums and bonbons of different forms. The eldest chose first. This privilege drew sighs from the younger ones as they saw the coveted objects disappear; but grandmamma's pockets had a double lining, and sugar turtle-doves and chocolate sabots restored happiness to those who had been less fortunate in the drawing. On this day, also, the children and grandchildren of

[1] The family of the dowager of Lorette was composed of Monsieur Charles, her eldest son, Irma's father; Mesdemoiselles Marie and Jeanne, her two eldest daughters, who were not married; Monsieur Henri, her second son, who married Mademoiselle Grout de Rivières, by whom he had six children; finally, her last child, Cecile, the widow of Monsieur de la Salle, who had three children and lived with her mother. Madame le Fer de la Motte had five children and twenty-one grandchildren.

Madame de la Motte received pieces of money in number equal to their respective years. Ah! if the Fountain of Youth could have poured its marvelous waters plentifully into the basin of Lorette, not one, even among the older children, would have made use of it. These children with youthful, blooming faces, longingly desired years; but when years came the generous grandmother and her compensations were gone.

Time and absence did not take from Irma the pleasant and cherished remembrances of these family reunions. We shall find frequent references to them in her reminiscences.

Though the grandmother was so happy in the sunset of life, she had known days of sorrow and, during the Reign of Terror, intense sufferings. Left a widow while still very young, with five little children, she lived for a long time in the constant apprehension of being parted from them, taken to prison, and thence to the scaffold. The Republic, however, generously contented itself with cutting down her trees, gathering her harvests, and taking the rent of her farm; but it left her to those dear children who were often in want of bread and clothing. In this distress the poor mother yielded to a weakness for which she afterwards reproached herself bitterly. She sent her servants once or twice to the *Décade* to procure bread. But of those evil days there remained in later years only the remembrance. She enjoyed good health until a very advanced age; and being surrounded by the respect and affection of every one, she sometimes feared that her happiness on earth was too great.

CHAPTER III

A FRIEND

THOUGH Irma found joys delicious and sincere in her family, though she knew how to gain and preserve the affections of all the companions of her childhood (and they never ceased giving her proofs of their attachment), yet she sought the treasure praised in Holy Writ—a true friend. She wished through an intimate friendship to secure a heart capable of understanding all her aspirations. Such a one she hoped to find in a young relative whose family was closely united to hers, more by the ties of affection than of blood. Her name was Angelina Payan. Angelina was the youngest of her family, the favorite of all, and very much spoiled, as everybody endeavored to gratify her every desire. Solid Christian principles and a charming disposition preserved her from conceit, but she was a stranger to that devotedness of heart which makes one forget herself for others. Though not beautiful, she was exceedingly graceful, gay, and amiable; she was passionately fond of birds, flowers, the sea, and all the beauties of nature, and she knew how to embellish them with all the charms of a vivid imagination. Irma attached herself with all the ardor of her soul to this friend whose tastes agreed so well with her own. With exquisite simplicity she said to her, "My dear Angelina, I must be loved; it is a necessity for me to love and be loved; without this there is no happiness for me."

This friendship was not sterile, for Irma endeavored to impart the sentiments of faith which filled her own heart to her friend who was serving God more through fear than love. In one of her letters she says:

Often since our last interview I have reflected on your character and thought of the diverse impulses of your heart. Alas! I am a thousand times more guilty than you are, Almighty God having given me a soul which feels so keenly His innumerable benefits. He has made me to know His divine love and feel the ineffable delights of His grace. Dear Angelina, when I contemplate a God made man for me and born in a stable, when I see His Precious Blood gushing from His Divine Heart, mine becomes deeply moved, and I feel that I *must* love Him who has loved me to such an excess.

She adds:

I send you a little landscape to which I have given a stormy sky, but I desire that you may have no other tempests than those which raise the waves of the sea, no other storms than those which disturb the peace of nature. I hope that henceforth we shall employ our happy moments only in inciting each other to walk constantly in the path of virtue, and that the joy of meeting may renew our courage. We must will what God wills; and as He wills that I love you, you can imagine the affection of your Irma.

Again she writes to her dear Angelina:

If you only knew how beautiful the sea was last evening! It was high, very high; it surrounded the cottage near the road. The boat we were in, though tied to the shore, was tossed by the waves. To-day we have high tide, and this evening we intend going to the beach again. How I wish you were here to share our pleasure! I beg you, I entreat you, to come. My mother bids me invite you. Do come. And prepare yourself; you will need

to be calm. In the midst of the waves our blood will course through our veins like the white foam against the rocks; but you will remember that it is God who created this vast sea, and who in His goodness has placed us so near this beautiful ocean. We shall be surrounded by God's immensity, we shall rejoice and find pleasure, but like children in the arms of their father.

In another letter Irma wrote:

Angelina, what a pretty name you have, how sweet to pronounce! Perhaps you do not know that in Messrs. O'Murphy's large grounds across from ours there is a fine echo. Sometimes I go and play with it, for we are old friends. Instead of receiving me into its dwelling, it runs at the first sound of my voice. The names I loudly call are "Jesus," "Mary"; then those of my parents. Your turn comes; the echo expects it, desires it. Slowly and with sweet expression I say, "Angelina, Angelina," and it repeats with the same tenderness, "Angelina," "An-ge-li-na." I lower my voice a little—it imitates me; I take a softer tone—it yields to my caprice. My voice dies away—the echo vanishes. O the delicious moment! All is silent around me, night approaches, and the birds that hushed their songs to listen to us, now go to sleep with sweet recollections. Then I place a finger on my lips, another on my heart, and I hear an echo more faithful and more intelligent than that of Rivoli,[1] for it repeats the thought. Dear Angelina, you can guess the name that the echo of friendship repeats to me, and will repeat to me all my life, without weariness on its part or lassitude on mine. Come, then, come with me, and you will also say my name. It is that of the Queen of Angels. We shall forget ourselves to think only of this divine Mother, and with the echo we shall have three voices to say *Vive, Marie!*

[1] Rivoli, the name of Messrs. O'Murphy's broad estate. The owners, as kind as they were obliging, left it for the use of Monsieur le Fer's large family. Irma and Angelina had erected a little grotto-chapel in one of its most picturesque spots.

These two young girls, so richly endowed with imagination, may have too freely indulged this power which, with them, needed special restraint and direction. Irma kept up a regular correspondence with Angelina, notwithstanding their almost daily meetings. This too lavish effusion of the heart was, later on, a source of danger and suffering for her. Domestic occupations became insupportable; she wished to spend her life in reading, writing, drawing, and idle dreaming. She created imaginary griefs in order to enjoy the sweetness of weeping over them. She did not read romances, but every object, every person, furnished her with a theme for composing one.

While her companions were enjoying noisy plays which wearied her, she would retire to a terrace on the border of the river, and there, listening to the monotonous and regular murmur of the waves dying softly at her feet, she would lapse into a vague and enfeebling sadness.

This state of reverie, however, did not degenerate into bad humor. When Irma returned to real life it was to show amiability, goodness, and attention to her family. She neglected neither the care of her little sister nor the education of her brothers, and she fulfilled her Christian duties with exactness; yet her piety unconsciously weakened. Though God demanded her whole heart, she allowed herself to be led by the vagaries of that imagination which she knew she should restrain, but to which she found it easier and sweeter to yield. She glided down this rapid declivity without having courage to stop, much less to retrace her steps. Meals and sleep taken at regular hours were a burden which she wished she could lay down. She contented herself with some light food, and, though she retired at the hour

prescribed, she prolonged her watchings during a great part of the night. Her health began visibly to decline, and she soon became a cause of much anxiety to her family.

Madame le Fer was afflicted at the state of her daughter's health, which became more enfeebled every day; but, engrossed with the care of her younger children, she did not suspect that Irma's illness might have a moral cause. She compelled her to follow all the prescriptions of the physician; but these had no satisfactory effect, because they did not reach the source of the trouble. It was under these circumstances that a sister of Monsieur le Fer, Madame de la Salle, asked for Irma, purposing to care for both mind and body. Irma gladly accepted her aunt's invitation to spend some time at Lorette, the country-seat of her father's family, which had taken its name from a little chapel [1] situated on the estate.

[1] This sanctuary is the first station in the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Saint Jouan. The sailors of Brittany who annually depart for Newfoundland are, during their voyage, frequently assailed by violent tempests, which shiver their masts, rend their sails, and threaten to engulf them. In this imminent danger, the old Breton faith of the sailors revives. They remember Mary, the Star of the Sea, and for an instant their trembling voices prevail over the roaring of the waves and the fury of the tempest. They solemnly promise her, if she save them from shipwreck, to go barefooted, clad in white, to thank her at Notre Dame de Saint Jouan; and when the Queen of Heaven has heard their humble and confident prayer, when she has lovingly smiled on them and brought them safe to port, they never forget their vow.

The first station on their pilgrimage is Our Lady of Loretto. These hardy sailors, with swarthy complexions and muscular limbs, show in their expressive countenances the sentiments of faith and gratitude with which their hearts are penetrated. When the priest who conducts them intones the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and all, with one vibrating and energetic voice, sing this pious and beautiful chant, when mothers and children mingle their tears and accents with those of the poor sailors no one can remain insensible to this touching spectacle; no one can leave it without a renewal of confidence in Mary, who is so truly called *Auxilium Christianorum, Consolatrix Afflictorum.* The 26th of October, 1878, two hundred men on board the *Atlas,* having escaped a terrible tempest which carried off under their eyes four captains, went to Loretto to accomplish their vow, and had two

We have said that Irma's venerable grandmother, Madame le Fer de la Motte, lived at Lorette with her three daughters; two of these were not married, and they consecrated their lives to good works.[1] Madame de la Salle was a widow with three children, Cecile, Henri, and Marie,[2] all younger than Irma who loved them almost as much as she did her own brothers and sisters. Abbé Cardonnet, whom she will frequently mention, lived at Lorette as a preceptor, a chaplain, and especially as a friend.

Brilliant in mind, this estimable priest possessed also profound learning and enlightened piety, which moderated in his character whatever was too ardent. Irma entrusted to him the direction of her soul, and God granted her a precious grace in giving her a guide who, understanding her, did not try to stifle her imagination, but employed all his efforts to direct it and to turn it to God. Abbé Cardonnet was sincerely interested in Irma, and he contributed more than any one else to make her return to the realities of life, to her family, and to God. Later she was grateful for all he had done for her, but, at the time of which we now speak, it was not thus. She did not thank him for conspiring with her family to allure her from the charm of her reveries, though he did it by engaging her in work she liked to do. Her Latin was continued under his direction. She also attended the lessons which a professor of drawing gave to her cousins. Her father visited her daily. She

Masses celebrated, one of requiem and one of thanksgiving. I read in the *Journal:* "Finally they reached the humble sanctuary of Notre Dame de Lorette, which the ivy envelops in a mantle of perpetual green. The remembrance of this little chapel by the sailors of our shore is as faithful as its poetic foliage."

1 About 1830 Monsieur Henri de la Motte gave up his military career and for many years he and his family lived also at his mother's home.

2 Later Madame Vittu de Kerräoul.

frequently saw her mother, brothers, and sisters. Not only her family, but her aunts and their friends also surrounded her with affectionate care, and, without annoying her, tried to make her life pleasant. She was free to enjoy the charms of the country, of which she was enthusiastically fond. Well-chosen reading occupied her leisure hours. She felt that she could be happy, yet she found a satisfaction in persuading herself that she was not; and she had reason for this conviction, for there is no real happiness for a soul that resists God.

It was only after several years of struggle, effort, and violent combats against herself that she sacrificed to God all that daydreaming, which was so alluring, yet so direful in its effects. Of this struggle, Irma wrote: "I know not what charm there was in my folly, yet, though it rendered me unhappy, I would never have had the courage to renounce it, without the grace of God. Yes, such is the human heart. It requires a painful effort to consent to suffer no more. Is it, then, so sweet to suffer?"

One of the means that God employed to draw her completely to His love was the death of her friend. When Angelina had reached her eighteenth year, she was attacked by consumption, and, as several members of the family had already fallen victims to this disease, her sisters removed her from the seashore to a milder climate. From the first appearance of the malady in her friend, Irma's disquietude was extreme. She suffered much in being separated from Angelina, in being deprived of the pleasure of taking care of her, and often even in not hearing from her; for Angelina was too feeble to write, and her sisters rarely found time to do so. Irma anxiously desired to visit Rennes that she might again see the one she loved so dearly; but as

she was not able to conceal the fears she entertained for her friend's recovery, nor to control the excess of her grief; and, moreover, as Angelina expressed no wish to see her, she was denied this last sad consolation. Sometimes she flattered herself that the youthfulness of her friend would triumph over the disease, but oftener she gave way to gloomy forebodings in expectation of the dreaded misfortune for which nothing could console her. So she felt the need of turning to God for strength to bear the trial. Fearing she had harmed Angelina, she sought to repair her wrongs by addressing most fervent prayers to Heaven for the health, and especially for the soul of her friend.

Alas! this young girl, so gay, so graceful, so charming that every one submitted to her indifference and coldness without ceasing to love her, was not to be restored to health. For six months her sisters contended for her with death, but when the leaves fell in autumn, God called her to Himself.

Irma's grief was extreme; she expressed it in the style enjoyed by Angelina, as if thus to charm her still:

I ask you of the earth, the sea, the day, the night—no creature possesses you. You are with God. Ah! why does your happiness draw from me so many tears? I do not know how the flowers can bloom or display their colors. I wonder that the birds sing. It seems to me that the world should end with you, Angelina.

Ah! if you but knew how I love you. Your death has not destroyed my love. The remembrance of you engrosses all my thoughts. Your existence is blended with mine. How is it that with two loves and a double life, it seems at times that my soul is annihilated and that I have ceased to exist?

Irma was now in her nineteenth year. The effect produced in her soul by the death of Angelina was as

deep as it was lasting and salutary. At a glance she saw the nothingness of earthly things. She felt dissolving under her feet that which had appeared to her the most solid basis of happiness—human friendship. She asked herself with dread what had been the object of this extreme tenderness. She recalled all their conversations, the counsels she had given to her friend, and all now seemed to her very empty, if not dangerous. No doubt she exaggerated her faults in the bitterness of her anguish, but her regrets and sorrow brought her nearer to God.

Writing to Mademoiselle Elvire Payan, Angelina's sister, she says:

I received your letter, which made me weep so much. Your soul is sad; a bitter sorrow rends it. I wish I could calm it; but, alas, I have lost my friend, the only confidante of my thoughts, my pains, and my pleasures. I cannot recall the day my love for her began. Ah! my Angelina, do you not remember in your new abode the lovely days of our childhood, our innocent joys, our youthful years when we were so happy?

She died in your arms! How you must have suffered! I can see her, pale, expiring, raising her hand to her forehead to make the sign of the cross, and dying without being able to bring it down to her heart. Elvire, you knew my desire, but God who knew my weakness kept me away from this heartrending scene. He did not permit me to receive her last sigh.

At the moment when her soul parted from her body I was in the chapel at Lorette. I received Holy Communion for her; it was the end of our novena. Oh! I had great need that God who had taken away my friend should come to strengthen my heart.

How I thank you for all your watchings, your kindness, your fatigues at the bedside of Angelina! This makes me love you as if it had been done to me. But I entreat you, in the name of the friendship you have

pledged me, and which has taken birth in a tomb, to moderate your grief. Live for me. Listen!—I am very cowardly—I hoped my sorrow would make me die. Live to speak to me of Angelina, and when others will have forgotten her we shall speak of her still—yes, always.

To this cousin, who had been initiated into the confidence she gave Angelina, Irma says further:

Be so good and virtuous that in seeing you I may forget that my counsels, and still more my example, could have made Angelina commit faults which neither the pains of her illness nor the fires of purgatory may have yet expiated. Oh! I do not wish to have to reproach myself thus in future. Perhaps I am severe with myself; but my past weakness causes me to weep so much that I hope never to utter a word which can make you offend God.

A little later she writes to the same cousin:

There remains to me still a Friend whom alone I wish to love. He does not die, He will not abandon me. If my heart cannot bear the weight of its sorrow, I shall cast it upon His. Not only is that Divine Heart not disturbed by my troubles, but It teaches me to draw from my sufferings the sweetness of peace. In Him thenceforth I place my happiness and all my hope; my future will be heaven, and death will be to me a gain.

Only one more letter referring to Angelina is found among Irma's papers.

Two years ago to-day my friend died. Mass was said for her this morning at eight o'clock. What an affecting dream I had last night! I was reunited to my Angelina. I heard that voice, so dear to me; I pressed that hand,—many times before had I clasped it in mine; I saw that graceful form. I found again that friend, more beautiful, more tender than ever; I clasped her in

my arms and I almost feared I would cause her to die, she was so fragile. She spoke to me and I could hear her. I showed her the trees of our grove, the flowers of our grotto, the ivy of the valley. All had grown much during her long absence. Nature was so beautiful, more beautiful even than the day I saw again the gardens of Lorette after my long illness of the month of May. I said to her: See how the flowers are smiling; and what perfume! Listen to the birds, the lark of the hawthorn, dost thou remember it?

O happiness! She had been given to me, she was mine. Alas! The bliss vanished at my awaking, but the sweet vision remains in my mind. I said to myself: Soon my Angelina will show me the ravishing charms of her new home. She will press me to her heart and have me admire the eternal spring which is never disturbed by a cloud. There the flowers never fade; the heart never has disappointment, happy dreams never have an awakening.

A retreat that Irma now made under a Jesuit Father completed what she termed her "conversion." She always spoke of this period as her "period of a sinner's life," and she regretted with deep compunction those vagaries of her youth. Exteriorly she had always passed for a person of exemplary piety and devotedness, and it was the general opinion that her heart had never been sullied by grievous fault.

"Adversity," says Fénelon—and it is the same with sorrow—"is a forge which tempers the heart of man and prepares it for the duties of life." It was thus for Irma. God, by one of those marvels which His goodness conceals from human view, imparted His divine strength to the soul of Irma, who now placed in His heart the too heavy weight of her sorrow. A hymn of gratitude and love will henceforth arise from the comforted heart of this lovable child.

CHAPTER IV

OCCUPATIONS IN THE FAMILY—CATECHISM—MONTH OF MARY—OTHER SPIRITUAL WORKS

IN resolving to give herself to God, Irma did not have to sacrifice the love of worldly pleasures; these had no attraction for her. Dress, amusements, dances, and all those things that ordinarily captivate young girls were painful tasks. She complained of them in her letters. To one of her sisters she wrote:

Mother wishes me to fix my hair in a way that will take so long and be so tiresome that I feel like crying even in thinking of it. Pity me, for in a few moments I shall have to commence my toilet. What a misery to have to go to a party; it wearies me only to think of it! This evening I shall have to dance, hold myself straight, step in time, and be confined within the four walls of a parlor, with the prospect of finding the bean in my piece of cake, and then being made queen! Oh! I'll die of it! And to die of *ennui!* What a frightful death!

The repugnance Irma felt to going out in society was sometimes manifested on her pretty face. One of her father's friends, in undertaking to make her dance, said smilingly, "Since they will make a martyr of her, I might as well do it as any one else."

Later, when all her thoughts turned towards God, she endeavored to sanctify this tediousness; and when she had to take part in these *soirées,* she offered them to God for the conversion of sinners, the deliverance of the souls in Purgatory, and other intentions of this kind.

If in youth Irma did not attach value to her appearance nor to what could enhance her exterior grace, she was not for all that free from self-love; she merely allowed it to turn in another direction. She was too eager to acquire knowledge and to appear brilliant. She had an excellent heart and never voluntarily pained any one; but her frequent sallies of wit and her fondness for raillery sometimes caused her regrets.

"I daily forget the promises I make to God," she said to one of her friends, "I am impulsive and speak hastily. I am inclined to tease and to dart piercing arrows. Alas! these arrows wound my own soul before reaching their object. How humiliating to be enslaved by the tongue, to allow myself to be carried away by jest, and thus become impolite even towards persons I love. Yet I am not wicked, for I do not wish to pain them. Pray for me; I desire to correct myself, and to renounce this spirit which is so displeasing to God."

To another she said on the same subject: "There is, perhaps, no one more indifferent than I am to the luxury of the house, to dress, and to the table; but the devil loses nothing thereby, for he fills me with an excessive desire of acquiring knowledge. I dream of nothing but books, drawing, and study. I fear to lose the thought of my salvation in all this tumult, for books inflame and intoxicate me as champagne would do. Without religion such study would become a passion for me. Sometimes I think it is permissible, but that is an error. All is vanity except to love and serve God."

The same complete surrender with which Irma indulged her fancies and reveries she carried into the service of God, when for His love she had sacrificed her daydreams. She had now but one thought, one aim—to give herself without reserve to God and to spend herself

in gaining hearts for Him. For several years, it is true, she did not know how best to procure the glory of God and the welfare of souls, but, from the first moment that she surrendered her heart to God, she never turned her eyes from the end she had in view. Meantime, far from neglecting the good that could be done around her, she redoubled her care for her younger sisters and brothers. Speaking of this period she wrote:

I brought up my little Clementine for her parents and for God. I taught her the catechism and also to love me. I placed my future happiness on her feeble childhood. Poor earthly happiness, why dost thou lean upon a reed? Often when she lay in her cradle, we spoke together of Heaven; and I remember one day she threw her little arms around my neck and said to me, "Godmamma, since it is so nice to be in Heaven, kill me." When she was older, I spoke to her of our Heaven on earth—Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Fervent desires inflamed her heart, and God in His mercy gave me the happiness of seeing her admitted to the Holy Table one year earlier than the customary age. How delighted I was to conduct her to the retreat preparatory to her First Communion, to speak to her of the goodness of God, and to prepare in her heart an altar for this God of love! I brought her to the feet of our father and mother, that they might bless her; and when she had gone to bed and we were alone she threw herself into my arms and wept, and I wept too. "To-morrow, to-morrow," she said to me; "there is but one night between God and my heart." Oh! what a blessed night she passed. God had pardoned all her faults, and the morrow was to be the day of her First Communion. All the family assembled on that day to share our happiness. Our dear grandmother also came to the grand First Communion dinner. For many years, on similar occasions, she left Lorette and her old armchair to be present at these joyous feasts. How happy she was to be among us, and how happy we were around her!

It must be acknowledged that Irma, who occupied herself so intensely with the spiritual welfare of her little sister, neglected somewhat the material care she should have bestowed upon her. She often used to say to her: "My dear child, God regards only the interior, and if you are kind and obedient, He will love you as much dressed in muslin as in silk. Do you desire to be elegantly attired, when Jesus was clad in an old purple mantle? Be humble and industrious, and do not dispute with your brothers. Do this for the good God, and I also will reward you."

These recompenses were not always what Clementine would have chosen. To accompany her to Mass, to visit poor families, or to assist at the catechism which Irma gave in the evening to the poor of the neighborhood were the rewards. But the little godchild was flattered by being considered a somebody; besides, she was always happy when with her sister, who profited by every occasion to instruct her. Every object offered matter for reflection.

Whenever her brothers had studied very diligently and had been exceedingly good, the most acceptable reward Irma could give them was to tell one of the stories which she could most skillfully make up. She had inherited from her father a wonderful talent for invention. Even grown persons sometimes stopped to listen to her, and her brothers always wished that the recital might last longer. Before beginning Irma would stick a pin in the candle, putting it higher or lower according to the degree of goodness which merited the reward. One of her brothers once exclaimed, "O candle, how rapidly you burned! How sorry we were to see you consumed so quickly! Selfish, like all children, we never thought of the fatigue our sister might experience."

Irma continued to interest herself in her brothers, but it was their souls she had especially in view. By her attention, her kindness, and her entire forgetfulness of self she endeavored more and more to gain their affection, and thus to turn their hearts to God. With the younger ones she studied, and with the older she read passages of the Holy Scripture, the beauties of which she made them love and admire. Always gay yet thoughtful, she took part in their conversations, went with them on their walks, and drew from the most indifferent circumstances a comparison, or made a remark, that would elevate their hearts toward eternal things.

In her desire to make God known and loved, Irma assembled the poor of the neighborhood every Sunday evening to explain to them the catechism. At the house of a man, poor indeed in all things except in the possession of an excellent wife, Irma gave these instructions, which she always adapted to the intelligence of her hearers.

All Monsieur le Fer's children had learned to read in Royaumont's large Bible, which particularly delights children, on account of the pictures that adorn its pages and engrave indelibly on the memory the holy and touching narratives of the Sacred Scripture. Irma thought that the children of her class would like this divine book, as she loved it herself, and she desired to make them acquainted with it. It was a great favor to be permitted to carry the Bible to and from the place of instruction, a favor which was granted to the most docile and studious of her pupils. After the explanation of the catechism, Irma showed the pictures and explained the texts to those who had listened with attention.

She knew how to interest both the children and their mothers by mingling examples with her explanations,

and by questioning her hearers on the instruction of the preceding Sunday. The lesson was usually given in a cloud of smoke. She had to furnish candles, if they wanted light, as well as to provide seats; and this, again and again, for during the little vacations which she gave her pupils the proprietor of the dwelling (who bore a striking resemblance to the Miron of Louis Veuillot) used the benches, even to the last board, "to boil his pot."

Irma also made a great display in the distribution of prizes for catechism. The rewards were insignificant in themselves, but she presided with so much graciousness, and there was so much kindness in the brief address she made and in her manner of offering the prizes, that all the little ones were contented and happy. And if they had even the least good will, she inspired them with a desire to be instructed.

Without knowing it, Irma was actuated by Lacordaire's maxim, "We can do good to men only by loving them." And if she did so much good among the poor, it was doubtless owing to the great love she bore these privileged ones of the Lord. She shared their poverty; and the little money she possessed was theirs, for she could keep nothing for herself. She placed a small library of choice works at the disposal of those who could read, and gradually increased the number of books.

She procured the opportunity of making retreats for all those who had the desire and the time to make them; and to facilitate this good work she had not only to provide food for those who made the retreats, but, when it was the father of a family, she had to give what he would have gained by his week's labor, besides supporting the mother and children in the meantime. When she had spent all her own money she would solicit from

her relatives and friends. Nothing was difficult or impossible to her when she worked for her dear poor. And her clients were not ungrateful. When before starting to America she returned home after an absence of nearly two years at Ruillé, they were anxious to see her and to express their thanks. She never thought she devoted too much time to them, and she enjoyed their visits so much that her sisters had to feign jealousy, in order that they might have a few moments of the short time she was to spend with her family.

All the unfortunate had claims on Irma's affection; but she was particularly interested in the little boys, probably because at this time they were much more neglected at Saint Servan than were the little girls. One of her sweetest dreams was to provide an orphanage for them. She often spoke of it to her sister Eugenie, to whom she wished to entrust the temporalities, reserving to herself only the care of their souls. In 1851 she wrote from America: "That old and cherished desire of having an orphan asylum will soon be realized. We shall have our little boys in August." One of her objects in studying Latin was to teach its elements to the poor children whom God might call to the priesthood. Without doubt her personal fortune would not have sufficed to meet the expenses of an orphanage, but to her this was no obstacle. Having an absolute confidence in Almighty God she would say, "If He approve my undertakings, He is rich and liberal enough to pay the expenses."

She sought by preference the greatest ignorance and the deepest misery. One day she met a young boy who realized on this point all her desires. He was called Jean Louis. Whether he ever knew his family is doubtful, but, if he did, he had forgotten its name. He

had no knowledge of his earthly father, and no one had taught him to say, "Our Father who art in heaven." He wandered like a vagabond on the earth. He was a compound of the grossest ignorance and coarseness; in fact, he was a real treasure for Irma, and it is hard to describe how joyfully she endeavored to cultivate his untutored mind. To facilitate the work, she wanted to have him remain at her own home; but her father, who did not wish to have the orphanage begin at his house, and, above all, with Jean Louis, would not allow her to keep her first protégé.

She accepted the refusal with a sad resignation but did not lose courage. Through the assistance of some pious friends, Jean Louis received Christian instruction, and she had the happiness of seeing him make his First Holy Communion. He was also placed in a position where he could gain an honest livelihood. He had not the inclination, however, to renounce entirely his nomadic life, but whenever he returned to Saint Servan, he inquired for his first benefactress in terms expressive of his gratitude.

The sweet and tender devotion of the Month of Mary was not known at Saint Servan up to 1836 except in some pious families. Irma obtained for her poor the happiness of assembling to pray and to honor Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who once like them had been poor. She secured the largest house in the neighborhood to use as a chapel. The little altar on which the statue of the Blessed Virgin stood was adorned with the prettiest flowers of the season. By laying boards on chairs she was able to seat nearly all the audience, old and young; for if the mothers came, their children had to be admitted also. After these had promised to be very quiet, Irma grouped the little ones around her, and sleep generally

came to help them keep their promise. The reading, always interspersed with interesting anecdotes, was listened to attentively by the older ones; they also answered the evening prayers with devout attention.

One of Irma's greatest and constant regrets was that she could not sing. How happy she would have been to chant the praises of the Lord! A hymn is a prayer which tranquilizes the soul while elevating it sweetly toward God. As the Month of Mary is not complete without hymns, it was necessary to refresh and please her audience by making them learn to sing the goodness and glory of Mary. In this emergency she had recourse to her sister Cecile and two of her friends, the Mesdemoiselles Leroux, who, notwithstanding the great distance they lived and their numerous occupations, considered it a pleasure to go every evening to lend their voices for making the Blessed Virgin known and loved.

Many years have elapsed since then. The Month of Mary is celebrated with much more solemnity, the assembly is much larger, and the music more brilliant; nevertheless, these first reunions of the poor have remained among the most cherished memories of those who contributed to them by their hymns.

When Irma thought of going amongst the Americans, and was told of their innate love of music, her inability to sing caused her fresh regret. She tried all means, human and divine, to obtain success in this art. She practiced singing a canticle to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in which are found the words, "Aid my voice to praise Thy power." She repeated them incessantly with a stifled and expiring voice, but Jesus remained deaf to her call. She asked her younger sisters to give her lessons. Cecile positively refused; Elvire, very young at that time, let herself be tempted by the promise

of a pretty shawl, but, when she got the reward, she hid, so as to be no longer obliged to teach so hopeless a pupil. Irma persevered in her illusions until she went to Ruillé; there they vanished forever. Having accepted an invitation to sing a Christmas hymn before her companions in the novitiate, she was greeted by such peals of laughter that she never afterwards doubted her incapacity.

When Irma left Saint Servan it cost her a great deal to abandon the pious works to which she had so lovingly devoted herself; before starting she distributed them to her sisters as a precious legacy, entreating them to continue these works of charity for God and for her. She wrote to Cecile: "Love our catechism a little, and our children; they belong to Jesus. Ah! if you could prevent their offending our dear Savior! Courage, my dear Cecile, courage!"

She earnestly recommended to Eugenie the Month of Mary for the poor, and also the care of facilitating for them the means of making retreats. "Use the remainder of my money for the latter," she said; "procure this happiness for Fanchette and Louison, for I do not see why these honest people should be deprived of spiritual consolations. But try especially to have Yvon make a retreat." It was Yvon [1] who had given the use of his house for catechism. He declared that he understood the mysteries, but he easily forgot the commandments, particularly the seventh; and Irma hoped that a good retreat would convert him. Many years after her departure, she continued to be interested in her poor of

[1] Yvon was an idle fellow, who compelled his wife to do his work for him. "Madame," he would say to her, "what have you to give me for dinner?" "Alas! nothing," she would reply, when she had not been able to obtain alms. "Then go quickly and get me some bread; and remember if you give me nothing, I shall give you something."

Saint Servan. "Try to help them this winter," she wrote; "they must suffer from the cold. Write to me about them, and tell my good people I shall always love them."

CHAPTER V

ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS—FIRST INTENTION OF BECOMING A MISSIONARY

A SPECIAL occasion for exercising her zeal soon presented itself to Irma. An English Protestant lady, a widow with three children, had recently taken up her residence in the neighborhood. She seemed to be in good faith, and Irma, persuaded that it was necessary only for her to know the truth in order to embrace it, zealously instructed her in the Catholic religion. She gave her books of controversy, and procured interviews for her with a learned priest. Whenever she desired to witness a religious ceremony Irma took her to the church. The children, too, were the objects of her affection, and she lavished on them the kindest attention. She was at the same time deeply concerned about a young woman, who, having married an irreligious man, had lost her faith. By her visits, her conversations, and her letters Irma recalled the truths of our holy religion to the young woman's mind, and endeavored to make her see them in a consoling, amiable, and attractive light. With the non-Catholic, Mrs. Foote, she was obliged to employ argument, but with the other she addressed the heart. The latter was easily conquered, but Irma soon perceived that far from seeking enlightenment in her intercourse with Catholics, Mrs. Foote was really trying to make proselytes to her own views. If Irma's hopes with this lady were not realized, their intercourse was, nevertheless, a means of

forwarding her own religious vocation. She often said afterwards that if she had gained this soul to God she would, in all probability, have thought only of continuing her little apostolate among the Protestants of her own country; but the obstinacy of this woman inspired her with the idea of bringing to Jesus Christ souls that had not yet had an opportunity of knowing Him, souls that sighed for the truth and asked but grace to see the light and follow it. Her intention at the beginning, however, was not to labor for Protestants, but to devote herself to the conversion of savages.

This first inspiration had been given to her by Abbé Carret, a missionary apostolic, who about 1834 came to France to beg alms for his poor mission. Before canvassing at Saint Servan, he told of the miseries of the savages. He was certainly not eloquent, but he spoke with so much conviction, and there was such unction even in his drawling voice, and he seemed so holy that he touched hearts, and probably heads, for many of the young people wished to share his missionary labors. Abbé Carret received abundant alms, but the enthusiasm disappeared with him; and Irma, who showed the least, was perhaps the only one who preserved it in her heart. She spoke of it to Abbé Cardonnet only, and waited in peace, resolved to follow the will of God when He should make it known to her through her director. In the meantime the abbé prayed for light to know whether God required her to sacrifice her country and family, and, not wishing to decide the case himself, he approved her intention of consulting Father Besnoin,[1] who was preaching a course of Lenten sermons at Saint Servan. Irma confided to him her pious desires.

[1] Father Besnoin, of whom frequent mention shall be made, was an old Jesuit priest, very learned but a little eccentric.

Father Besnoin advised her to consecrate her virginity to God and to use every means to procure His glory. He ended by saying, "You will go to the missions to convert the little savages." These words were deeply engraved on her memory.

From that time all her thoughts centered about one object. To go beyond the seas to the poor savages deprived of all spiritual help, to teach them to know God, to make them love their Divine Savior—these were the projects which inflamed her zeal; but not knowing when nor how she might leave France and cross the ocean to obtain the object of her desires, she kept her secret locked in her heart. It seems almost incredible that a young girl of her age should think of going so far away from family and country to exercise her zeal, especially as she felt no vocation to the religious life.

Though Irma was always deferential and submissive to her parents, she retained a spirit of independence which made all subjection painful to her. It was even difficult for her to bear the regularity of family life. When she left the house for an errand of charity, it cost to return at meal-time, though she was exact in doing so. "How I should like," she said, "to eat only when I am hungry, retire only when I am sleepy, and always wear the same clothing! How happy sheep are! God clothes them for the winter, and men shear them when summer comes, and they never have to think of their dress. I wish men would mutually agree to adopt a uniform which might always be worn; but these words in the Psalms of David, *you will change the form like a mantle,* show that the custom is so ancient that I fear it will subsist long after I am gone."

That spirit of independence which kept far from

Irma the thought of embracing the religious life, seemed to place insurmountable obstacles to her gaining souls to God in heathen countries. Nevertheless, He who had inspired her with this desire provided her the means of having it fulfilled.

Monseigneur Bruté, who was consecrated the first bishop of Vincennes (in 1834), occupied the See but a short time. Life is soon consumed on the missions, and this holy and venerable man, prodigal of his strength to conquer souls for Jesus Christ, soon fell a victim to his zeal. Abbé de la Hailandière, another Breton who had labored as a missionary in Indiana, was chosen to succeed Bishop Bruté. In 1839 he went to Paris to be consecrated and, before returning to America, he sought in France for co-laborers and resources for the needs of his diocese, where nothing was as yet solidly established; his predecessor was so poor that he and his priests were often in want of the necessaries of life. Irma was well acquainted with Bishop de la Hailandière's family, and she eagerly listened to all the details he gave of those distant countries where there was so much good to be done, where there were so many souls to enlighten and to save.

To Mademoiselle Elvire Payan, she hastened to write:

We had a visit yesterday from Bishop de la Hailandière, who spoke of his diocese and his great labors. Cecile wished to set out with him immediately. I did not say anything, but I thought it is there perhaps that God calls me. Eugenie laughs and will not believe me; her gayety and assurance make me heartsick. Poor dear sister, how she will weep when I leave her!

The sufferings, miseries, and privations which make up the missionary's life, far from extinguishing Irma's zeal, served to inflame it. As soon as she felt that

Indiana was the place chosen by God for her, her only thought was how to get there.

Abbé Cardonnet was a friend of the new bishop, and spoke to him of Irma's desires. As his Lordship wished very much to have good Catholics in his diocese, he gratefully accepted her as an addition to the religious that he hoped to take with him that very year in July.

Irma gives an account of this proceeding to Mademoiselle Elvire Payan:

I have just been to hear Bishop de la Hailandière. He preached nothing but America. It was a conversation rather than a sermon. On leaving the church I went to Madame B——'s, where I again saw him and also Abbé Cardonnet. His pressing exhortations to follow him to America were not mere jests, and I did not laugh while listening to them. An hour later I saw the two in the garden, and I went up to them. They were talking of me. Oh, what a moment! What! leave all I love, and so suddenly! How shall I ever ask my father, how speak of it to my mother! And he would take me away in three months! Abbé Martin and twenty priests are going with him. My dearly loved Elvire, I am happy here, perfectly happy, and it is for God alone that I would abandon my happiness in France. God! Ah! He is indeed worthy of some tears and heartbreakings.

At first Irma had no thought of making any religious engagements. She was to accompany the Sisters as an auxiliary, and determine subsequently whether she felt called to become a member of the community.

CHAPTER VI

VOCATION—LETTER TO HER FATHER—CONSENT OF MONSIEUR AND MADAME LE FER DE LA MOTTE

IRMA felt keenly the grief she would cause her family in making known to them her resolution to leave them forever. She herself did not know how she could live without those whom she loved so intensely that for many years she had not been willing to leave them, even for a day. To try her strength she asked permission to spend some time at the chateau of Lanrigan, near Combourg, with Monsieur and Madame de la Hailandière, who intended to accompany her afterwards to Rennes.

The ostensible object of her journey was to assist at the ordination of her brother Alphonse, who was to receive Minor Orders; but she wished to visit this city especially to consult Abbé Coëdro, a missionary and vicar-general of the diocese, a learned and prudent man in whom the Le Fer family placed great confidence. She had the opportunity of seeing him several times, and amid the fancies of her lively imagination he recognized the call of God. He was impressed by the warmth of her love for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, the good she effected in souls, her talents, her courage, and the elevation of her sentiments. He believed her capable of great sacrifices, great virtue, and great success. He blessed her and said: "Go, my daughter, go to the missions to accomplish the noble destiny that awaits you."

Strengthened by these words Irma returned to Saint Servan, her heart oppressed, nevertheless, by the thought of asking her parents' consent. She suffered keenly from the pain which she knew she was about to cause them. She would have wished to bear alone the sorrow of the whole family.

It was impossible for her countenance not to betray the trouble of her soul. Her mother expected to see her joyous after an absence which must have seemed very long to one of Irma's disposition; she noticed, instead, that her child was very unnatural and preoccupied, even in her marks of affection. A great change had been wrought in her soul. She had gone to see whether she could live away from her family, and God had taught her that all is possible with His grace. This grace must have been very powerful to have given her courage to afflict those whom she so tenderly loved. Still, she had yet to obtain her parents' consent to accompany Bishop de la Hailandière, who intended to return to America in July. Not feeling the courage to speak, Irma wrote the following letter:

Saint Servan, June 7, 1839.

My beloved Father:—My mother dressed me so elegantly to go to Rennes and made me look so beautiful that, although destitute of fortune, I have found a rich Suitor. You know how much I love you all. Well, notwithstanding the love I bear my country and my family, the proposal made me is so advantageous, so unhoped-for, that I have replied I shall accept if you give your consent. One thing, however, afflicts me; it is the thought of leaving you; for I shall have to go far away from my dear Saint Servan.

It will be a bitter grief to me; nevertheless, if you have the courage to sacrifice your daughter, I am determined to follow everywhere the One who asks my heart.

To be willing to leave you—you, O my father! whom I love so much—is a proof that my poor heart is entirely captivated. Yes, I acknowledge it. I feel I shall always be unhappy if you refuse your consent to this union. I would even be unhappy with you. Oh! I do not say this to my mother;—this one word would draw forth from her the permission I desire to obtain only after she has fully deliberated.

You will perhaps ask the name of Him whom I love with a love so strong that I would sacrifice my country and the thousand ties that bind me to it. His name!—Ah!—that would reveal the high destiny that awaits me, the immense fortune that is offered me. His name alone would take away from both you and my mother the liberty of opposing my desires. My poor father, did you but know who it is that asks your child! Think how good and lovable He must be, since He gives me the desire to leave you and follow Him! Were He to demand your six daughters, whom you love so tenderly, I believe you would give them all. But He does not ask my sisters; they will remain with you to love you and make you happy, as I would have wished to do all my life. Their lot is beautiful, but mine is still more beautiful.

My beloved father, you will not refuse your daughter to Him who promises to make her happy, who seeks her only for the love He bears her, and who will accept her without the goods of earth. You will not have the courage to pain me; you will not refuse your consent. I ask this favor of your heart, which beats only for the happiness of your children. The same I also beg from my dear mother.

I did not have the courage to speak to you, to throw myself at your feet and entreat you to let me go. My soul needs all its strength. I beg you, do not make me lose it by your tears. I can write no more—ah! you know me well.

Pray for me, and rejoice at a happiness which makes me shed so many tears. Wherever I may be, I shall

never cease to love you and to be your devoted and cherished IRMA.

The same day she wrote to her friend at Rennes:

Saint Servan, June 7, 1839.

I have told my father all, my dear Marie, as Abbé Coëdro has written neither to Abbé Cardonnet nor to him. Fortifying my heart with the strength of God, I took my poor dear father the letter that contained my projects. I told him that I had found an extremely advantageous offer at Rennes; that I had decided to accept it with his consent; that I should always be unhappy if he refused me, etc., etc.

My father was alone when I took him the fatal letter; he was sleeping. Oh! what an awakening! I hurried off to church, and on my return I threw myself weeping into his arms.

I then explained the beginning of my vocation, its continuance, and my decision. I told him I intended to go to the United States, but I could not tell him that it would be in a few weeks that I must leave him.

It is ten o'clock at night, and my mother has just returned from the country! While I am telling you my feelings, doubtless my father is showing her my letter. My heart throbs, but to-morrow I shall receive Holy Communion; I shall have my God to console me, and I shall be happy again.

It was with extreme sorrow that Irma's parents learned of her determination. They would never think of refusing their children to God, if He deigned to call them to His service, but her departure so soon to a community yet to be founded, to a country hardly civilized and with a climate so severe; her delicate health, her doubtful vocation, the lifelong separation—all these thoughts together greatly distressed them.

Madame le Fer had to see Bishop de la Hailandière;

she also consulted Abbé Coëdro and Father Besnoin; all advised her to consent to the departure which under the circumstances appeared to be a great imprudence. God undoubtedly wished to give Monsieur and Madame le Fer the opportunity of making a great sacrifice, and they did not recoil before it.

Irma had another interview with Father Besnoin, when he came to spend some days at Saint Servan. She now gives Mademoiselle Elvire Payan an account of it:

I have had two long conversations with Father Besnoin. Never have I heard such words. What a future he predicted for me!—wicked people; foreign manners and language; alone in the midst of the world; alone in the midst of solitude; France two thousand leagues away; Heaven becoming as brass to hear and help me; faith, hope, and charity vanishing from my soul; my reputation perhaps assailed by infamous calumny; hunger, cold, heat, etc.

"And now, my daughter," he said, "do you still wish to go?"

"Yes, Father."

"Very well; but you must be broken, crushed, annihilated, if God destines you to do good."

I confess, my dear Elvire, that I have a greater dread of the desolation of the soul than of all the miseries of exile and the pain of absence. Not to know whether one loves God, or believes in Him—even the thought of it is frightful! Who, then, will have pity on me? My God, it will still be Thou! I shall no longer feel Thy powerful hand, but it will nevertheless sustain me.

When I went to my mother's room I was so pale that she had me take some orange-water. The words of the good father had so much affected me that the blood all but ceased flowing in my veins.

Think of it! He read my thoughts in my eyes and repeated them to me; he reproved me for my languish-

ing look, my head inclined to one side; he made me walk before him, stand erect, and look him full in the face. "You must no longer be a poor little woman. Be great, be manly, be manly above all, before all," he repeated with force. Oh! that you had been there, you who are a real little man. How often I thought of you. My sisters have gone to bed—beloved sisters, whom after a few days I shall never see again.

At Rennes I looked in the cemetery for the cross that marks Angelina's grave. I wept. Like her I die to my country, my family, my friends, my associations, my memories. I die, but my soul lives; and to come near my friend I must tend towards God. I am *all* His; what shall I fear?

God, who always proportions His graces to the sacrifices He requires, knew how to sweeten with His consolations the grief Irma felt in separating from her family. She wrote to her friend Mademoiselle Marie le M——:

Saint Servan, July 18, 1839.

You are so kind, my dear Marie, to take every opportunity of writing to me. Yes, you will have to suffer, and suffer much. You do not know God's will in your regard. But I know it for myself. How much more peaceful my heart is than yours! But that is a mistake; both of us belong entirely to God—you in darkness, I in light; you in poverty, I in abundance; thus our happiness is the same. Perhaps you are more advanced in the love of Jesus. I love the consolations of God, and you the God of consolations. Abbé Martin, with whom I conversed a whole hour last evening, said that if God called me to do good it was impossible for me to remain in such spiritual opulence. "Some day," he said, "Jesus will make you drink His chalice. Will you refuse to press your lips to the bitter cup which He drained to the very dregs?" When he had proved to me that all the saints had passed through the desert of desolation, had walked in darkness, in tribu-

lation, without sensible sweetness, without either taste or feeling, it made me almost ashamed to be spoiled. I must be very weak, since God treats me like a child whom the least difficulty would deject, since He nourishes me, as Saint Francis de Sales says, with milk and honey.

The day of Bishop de la Hailandière's departure was fixed. Havre was to be the place of meeting for him and his co-laborers. Suddenly it was announced that the Alsatian community which had promised subjects to the Bishop of Vincennes had withdrawn. Whatever was their motive for thus acting, their refusal was formal and irrevocable, and Irma's departure was consequently deferred.[1]

The bishop could not prolong his stay in France. Unable to take religious with him, he yet did not abandon the hope of obtaining some the following year. He acquainted Monsieur and Madame le Fer with his proceedings and his hopes, adding that if he succeeded he would write to Irma, so that she could try her vocation with the missionary Sisters before accompanying them to America.

1 Rev. Father Mertian, superior of the religious of Alsace, who also were called Sisters of Providence, had promised a sum of money for their establishment in the United States. When for reasons unknown to us he withdrew from his agreement, he nevertheless gave the sum of thirty thousand francs to Abbé Benoit, who was sent by his bishop to get it. The land of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was bought with a part of this money, and the Sisters of Ribeauville, Alsace, thus became the agents of Providence for the Sisters of Ruillé-sur-Loir.

CHAPTER VII

LAST DAYS BEFORE IRMA'S DEPARTURE—HER SOJOURN AT SOULAINES

IRMA was greatly disappointed at the delay, but her family rejoiced that they could keep her with them longer. Her mother flattered herself that perhaps this was the means God would make use of to detain her daughter in France. But while Madame le Fer's heart was indulging this hope, Bishop de la Hailandière applied to the Sisters of Ruillé-sur-Loir. It was the time of the annual retreat, and the members were assembled to renew by the Spiritual Exercises their zeal, their love for God, and their desire to procure His glory. Though the end of the community is the education of young girls and the care of the sick in France, the Sisters accepted the new mission offered them, and consented to send in the following year, six of their number to join the prelate in America.

The bishop, pleased with his success, returned to his diocese. He informed Irma of the arrangements made, and advised her to go to Soulaines to begin her novitiate under Mother Theodore, who had been chosen superior of the missionary Sisters. This good Mother had begged only one thing of her new bishop, the assurance that her little community should have the privilege of Holy Mass every day. She would thus have the sacramental presence of Jesus, the happiness of receiving Him often, and she felt that, having Him, nothing could shake her courage.

Mother Theodore wrote to Irma asking her to come to Soulaines. She intended taking her to Ruillé to be formed to the religious life, but Irma's family desired to keep her at Saint Servan, and she herself was inclined to acquiesce in their wishes. She did not, however, recoil from the sacrifice; not even for a moment did she hesitate. Despite the assurances she gave her family that she no longer had her former apprehensions of the religious life, she was in no hurry to embrace it. One of her motives for delaying was to retain as long as possible the precious permission of receiving Holy Communion daily. She feared this favor might be denied her in community, and she knew the privation would cost her much. She lost sight of the fact that this privilege had been granted her not so much to make her happy as to make her strong. Abbé Cardonnet did not approve of delay, which might weaken her resolution, and in a rather severe letter to her he disregarded the pretexts of health, family, and studies, and concluded thus: "When God calls, death alone should hinder you from starting. Go, then, and if death surprise you on the way, it will be but the means of bringing you sooner to Him."

Irma hesitated no longer, and November was the time appointed for her departure. Her brother Charles accompanied her to Soulaines to place her in Mother Theodore's care.

The days preceding Irma's departure were very sad ones for the family who, whilst lavishing marks of the greatest tenderness upon her, tried to conceal their deep grief, so as not to add to the sacrifice of this devoted daughter, this cherished sister. Irma, sustained by grace, continued courageous, and preserved that sweet calm which might have appeared indifference to those

who did not know the sensitiveness of her heart. The very day of her departure she took a painting-lesson at Lorette, and worked with as steady a hand at her brother Charles's portrait as though she intended returning that very evening to the paternal roof which she had quitted forever. She left home without daring to bid adieu to her father, whose health would not permit painful emotions. She was soon to leave her brothers and sisters, who were very dear to her, and whom she would never see again. In a few hours she would receive her mother's blessing and bid her a final farewell; yet nothing in Irma's manner betrayed the feelings of her soul. God who proportions His grace to the sacrifice He demands, gave Irma the requisite courage, and her family the necessary resignation. Without shedding a tear Irma separated herself from all whom she loved so intensely. At this time she was twenty-three years of age.

Accompanied by her brother, Irma left Saint Servan on the 15th of November, 1839, for Soulaines, a modest village where for the past six years Mother Theodore had been superior. Mother Theodore was longingly awaiting the arrival of her future companion in exile. Charles confided Irma to her at Angers. Mother Theodore received her as a daughter, as a dear sister, and that day they formed a friendship which nothing henceforth could weaken or destroy. They certainly had not the same qualifications, but they had the same object in view, the same desires, the same hopes, the same heart. To a tender and fervent love for God and a lively zeal, Mother Theodore united a firm and decided character, a great capacity for business, and a judgment capable of understanding and directing Irma. She sought to gain

Irma's heart and sweeten the pain of the sacrifice by making her see the happiness of the religious life.

Irma's first letters from Soulaines have been lost. They were written to her father and mother, consoling and cheering them alternately. She told of her sorrow on leaving her brother—the last member of the family whom she embraced—an adieu which renewed all the others.

Irma had brought with her to religion both virtues and defects. Among the latter we shall mention the complacency she took in her intellect, and her too great tenderness for her family, which degenerated sometimes into excessive praise. The first fault was, from the beginning, attacked at the root. As to the second, her prudent superior did not suppress the abundant sap of the young tree entrusted to her; but, by pruning and engrafting, she caused it to bring forth wonderful fruit of the love of her family, perfected and supernaturalized by divine love.

Irma to Her Sister Cecile

Soulaines, November 18, 1839.

I shall not speak of your letter, my beloved sister, otherwise my eyes would resemble Lia's. Yesterday I left Charles and the city of Angers. We passed the Ponts-de-Cé, where the Vendéans perished so miserably and in such great numbers. The Loire is admirable. Mother Theodore and myself traveled in a carriage. There was so much mud that more than twenty-five times I thought we should be upset before reaching Soulaines. These roads are indescribable.

I heard Mass this morning in a barn. A church is being built which will be very pretty when finished. The village children come here to school and we are very good friends.

Mother Theodore is as good, amiable, and gracious as I expected. She is tall and well-formed, but her beautiful black eyes do not make her the beauty that her cousin described her to be. Perhaps I have come too late to see her in her splendor—"the sun is declining."

November 19.

Last evening I think I must have put on my table a ring as powerful as Beauty's,[1] for this morning I know all that is taking place at home. You have heard my children's catechism. Love them well, Cecile; they are yours now. If you can make them love God only a little, how happy you will be at the hour of death!

Yesterday I visited the little pastor of Soulaines. Monday I shall pay him another visit (in the confessional). I am easily suited in a confessor, and I find this one very good. Mother Theodore and myself are begging him to be our chaplain at Vincennes. It would certainly not be difficult to take him, for he could travel in a large box along with the mission articles. Though small, he has a good appearance.

We also visited the mayor. He told Mother Theodore she had with her a pretty postulant. His remark was not made in my presence, but she did not deny me the compliment. She had described me to her Sisters. They declared it was impossible that her description was complete; I must have some "ifs" or "buts," and doubtless I was blind of one eye, or humpbacked. In regard to the latter they were not altogether wrong; however, they said they were. They look at me with the affection of a sister, comb me, dress me, admire me, and find me charming. . . . I write childishness to you, but I must relate my success in the village of Soulaines. I am its Cæsar for beauty; at Rome my rank would be lowered.[2]

I have permission to write all I desire for eight days; after that I must show my letters and ask permission to

[1] Allusion to the story of "Beauty and the Beast."

[2] An allusion to Cæsar's saying "I would rather be first in an Iberian village than second in Rome."

write them. I am beginning my religious education. I do not even know the A B C of community life. I have found with Mother Theodore two very sweet and good young Sisters; they have informed me of the days of labor, especially of humiliation, that await me at Ruillé. It will cost me much to learn that I am nothing—nothing, less than nothing, since I am culpable. How my self-love is going to scream! But I feel that, to renounce myself, I must make desperate efforts. With the grace of God I will make them. I am called to high perfection. Ordinary perfection will not suffice for me in those distant countries, and God has brought me here that I may learn to die before causing other souls to live.

To Her Sister Eugenie

Soulaines, November 18, 1839.

It was only after arranging my room that I ventured to write to you. If you only knew what its condition has been since my arrival last night! I have made my bed, which is a feather bed; it will soon lose its plumpness.

At Saint Malo I forgot my Manual with all the pictures the good religious had given me. Think what a trick the good God played on me! But, my poor Eugenie, that was not the worst. Imagine Mother Theodore taking me aside last evening and, after a few words concerning my appearance, saying to me: "My dear child, I believe you are not vain of your exterior, but you have too much consideration for your intellect." I blushed like a cock. Think of it! at the first glance she had guessed my weakness. She advised me not to display such amiability. I was amazed; but I am prepared for anything. I proposed to become a simpleton, but she would not agree to that. Finally, to-day I have not uttered a single witticism. Please tell this to Cecile. How clear-sighted Mother Theodore is! Her revelations concerning my vanity are astounding. My dear

ones, how blind you were in my regard, how you spoiled me!

I have promised to be so simple at Ruillé that they will think me like everybody else, if not less—I whose vein of wit is always open, I from whom it had escaped in such sallies for eight days! Satan has something to do with it; it seems to me I have never had such pretty thoughts, and now all is finished! Cecile, my little Cecile, why can I not transfer some of them to Villegurie?[1] There they would not be contraband. Mother Theodore told me my style was too poetic when I wrote to her. What will it be then when Mother Mary[2] sees my letters? They are going to flay me alive. I hear myself scream from here. You are undoubtedly astonished that I relate such nonsense to-day. Ah! you see I can say everywhere that I love you, I pray for you, I think of you; and behold, it is the last time I can open my heart to you on the subject of wit, for I must not speak of a thing I shall not be supposed to have.

Mother Theodore said I shall have to study much at Ruillé; this does not console me for the loss of my wit, for I believe I love it yet more than knowledge. But, my Eugenie, at least they will leave me my heart, this heart that loves you so much. Despite myself I have already begun my fibs.[3] I must speak of you; I must persuade others that you are a treasure, a mine of perfection.

Well, I am happy. I shall only know how to love. I shall become very humble, very simple; you will gain by it, since you will have one-half of all the good I do. I need a great deal of courage. I thought that in leaving you I had sacrificed all. But no! O human life, so fertile in sacrifices, when wilt thou end for me? O beautiful eternity, come that I may love God without division; come that I may never more leave my Eugenie!

[1] Irma's home.

[2] Superior General of the Sisters of Providence at Ruillé-sur-Loir.

[3] The praises in favor of her family. All of her brothers and sisters experienced this need more or less, so they called it the family malady.

To Her Cousin Cecile de la Salle

Soulaines, November 22, 1839.
Feast of Saint Cecilia.

I prayed much for you this morning, my dear Cecile, and Mother Theodore united her prayers to mine. She asked me whether you had a religious vocation. I replied I thought not. Oh! what a great grace God bestows on those whom He calls to embrace the religious life. Though I am only at Soulaines, I already sigh for the day when I shall belong irrevocably to God. Last evening I wanted to dress as a religious, and we asked Mother Theodore's permission; but she looked at me and said, "What! you would make sport of the vesture which should be the price of your efforts, the object of your desires?" A shudder passed over me, and I felt that to obtain this simple costume I would henceforth have courage to suffer everything. See, my beloved Cecile, what God has done for your friend. You know I can truly say "God," for my nature has no inclination towards the religious life, which is so severe to the imagination and the senses.

Would you believe that I really wish to be at Ruillé to be humbled? It is not enough to have left you all. I suffered so much before that time that my sacrifice was scarcely painful, and I could say to God, "I did not think it was so sweet to die." Now if at Ruillé self be not crushed, I shall not advance, for as regards my heart I am happier here than at Saint Servan. I must advance. God wants my will, my active and independent mind; He wishes me to forget that I have loved, that I have been loved. Four months ago I left you; now I must leave myself. Pray for me, my cherished Cecile; this last sacrifice is absolutely necessary, or there will be no America for your Irma. At Ruillé they refused to accept two young girls whom Bishop de la Hailandière intended to take with him to Vincennes. You see I shall have to comport myself well, for this Order is very strict.

I am studying English with Mother Theodore. I sew and draw. At Soulaines I have at last found time [1] on the road to eternity!

To Her Aunt Madame de la Salle

Soulaines, Nov. 22, 1839—Feast of Saint Cecilia.

To-day is your feast—the feast on which I so much love to greet you. This morning at Mass I thought so constantly of you all that I hardly thought of God. I offered my Communion for the Cecilias, and then I divided the day into three parts: the morning was for you, the afternoon for your daughter, the evening for your goddaughter.[2] The offerings I made for you were mud, cold feet, smoke, and the care of my room which I swept carefully for your intention; then I studied English an hour with Mother Theodore. In the latter you gained nothing, unless it were the efforts I made to refrain from repartee, for I am reforming on this point.

> "'Tis not my fault if all to please I aim;
> It is Dame Nature that must bear the blame."

If Mother Theodore heard me say this how quickly she would say, "Proud one!" Fortunately she will not see my letter. My greatest sacrifice here is to open my mouth, and then close it to keep back a poor, pretty little thought which elsewhere would be good company. It is wonderful to what an extent you have spoiled me. Not one of you admonished me of my intolerable freedom of speech. Happily for me, they leave me my manner of thinking, and of loving God.

Mother Theodore is broad-minded, although austere; she is charming without knowing it, lively without being tiresome. One cannot help loving her. She must be one of those persons that one repents to have known when obliged to leave them, and that one is sorry to love even while remaining with them. She has already

[1] "Take care of the minutes, and the hours will take care of themselves."—*Madame Swetchine.*

[2] Irma's sister Cecile.

ceased caressing me, and I have become jealous of her cat *Laidronne,* to which she says as pretty things as Charles does to his *Fannie.*[1]

At recreation we are constantly talking of Vincennes. The two Sisters here wish to go with her. They are very good but, to my mind, are nothing compared to Mother Theodore. One of them, however, has a heart worthy of mine. When we are alone we speak of our families, and she acknowledges that time, instead of effacing her remembrances of them, makes them daily more and more vivid. This is dreadful! I do not dare to speak too much of you all before my clear-sighted superior, for the other day when I was saying that my grandmother praised her children so much, she remarked, "So, in your family admiration is a river incessantly ascending and descending." I saw plainly the "ascending" current was for me. . . . How lovely I think you all are! How charming my family is! How good!—this is what I think, and much more. Judge if this be sayable, now that I must fall flat into the mud of humility. Ah! Lord, put a bridle on my tongue and a guard of circumspection on the admiration of my heart!

To Her Sister Pepa

Soulaines, November 29, 1839.

Guess where I am going, my dear Pepa. I give you fifty chances—a hundred. Do you give it up? Well, I am going to Tours, and it is my good Mother Theodore who procures me this pleasure. The dear Sister! She may flay my spirit as much as she pleases, since she so well satisfies my heart. I spoke to her during dinner of Elvire Payan, and before we left the table it was decided we should go to-morrow—Friday—instead of Monday. We shall take the steamboat and ascend the Loire, spend Sunday at Tours, and on Monday go to Ruillé.

How good Mother Theodore is! I tell her about you

[1] The name of her brother's cat.

all, and she is almost pained to think I described her as so severe. It was partly in sport, but after all there was some truth in it. I was full of sallies, and the least shock I received caused me to throw out sparks. That is all past now. I pray you not to mention the poor buried one. *Mortuus est et sepultus est, non resurgat.* I have taken good resolutions, and I rather fear a state of torpor than too much activity. But your letters have given me several palpitations, and all night I was at Saint Servan. I dreamed that Mother Theodore, before taking me to Ruillé, brought me home. I felt my courage was already failing when she took me by the hand and led me aside. "Turn your eyes from the tears of your relatives," she said, "do not look at their arms open to embrace you; but, my child, imagine yourself at the hour of death. See the religious around your bed praying for you. Do you not hear a voice from heaven saying to you: 'Another moment, my daughter, and heaven is yours? Come, my beloved child, come, I am your God. Behold your crown. I am your recompense.'" My heart seemed to be leaving my body, and I was bounding towards this ocean of happiness when suddenly Sister Olympiade opened my door and awoke me by saying, "Live, Jesus, in our hearts!" I answered "Amen," sighing at the same time. I was no longer with you, and perhaps I am yet far from heaven. At Mass I wept and wept. All day I have been under the influence of this dream, otherwise I should not have written. My tears have solaced my heart. I am happy, very happy. After all, it makes very little difference what constitutes happiness, be it honor, pleasure, or *tears.*

CHAPTER VIII

RUILLÉ-SUR-LOIR—IRMA IN THE NOVITIATE

MOTHER THEODORE became every day more interested in her new postulant, and would have been happy to have her remain with her; nevertheless she sent her to Ruillé, where the novitiate, numerous and fervent, offered advantages for formation to the religious life which could not be enjoyed at Soulaines. She herself accompanied Irma to the Mother-House, and on the way gave her the consolation of seeing again the sisters of Angelina, who were then living at Tours, a city not far from Ruillé.

After these last hours granted to friendship, Mother Theodore consigned her postulant to Mother Mary, the Superior General, and to Sister Eudoxie, the Mistress of Novices; she then returned to Soulaines to await the orders of Bishop de la Hailandière. When the time of departure should be decided upon, Irma was to return to her in order that they, with their companions, might embark for the United States.

In the following letter to one of her younger sisters, Irma gives an account of her visit to Tours and of her arrival at Ruillé. How greatly she feared her entrance into the novitiate is disclosed in the succeeding letter to her mother.

To Her Sister Elvire

Ruillé, December 7, 1839.

It is your turn now, dear little sister. I am not going to speak to-day of a ramble among the cows and sheep;

I intend to tell about a grand journey among high and holy persons, among large and beautiful edifices,—my trip to Tours. It was decided *subito;* all was concluded in an hour.

We took a steamer at Angers. The passage was delightful. I sketched from the deck, but, notwithstanding the magnificence of the different scenes, I was anxious for five o'clock to come in order to embrace Elvire.[1] I did not have time to write to her, and I was a little fearful of her aunts. All went on beautifully, however, except a frightful nervous attack that Elvire had on seeing me. The little curé[2] has inimitable and unsearchable eyes. I find him admirable as a ruin, and would feel more inclined to weep over the fragments of his intellect than over Sparta and Carthage. It is pitiable! I think before long he will be exempted from duty. I went to the Ursuline convent to see Madame de Lignac. She is a religious *queen.* Never did I see such majestic sanctity. Abbé Dufêtre did not please me so much; he seemed very busy. He will leave in the spring to preach to the priests of the United States.

The Cathedral of Tours is beyond description. The stained glass windows, and particularly the beauty of the towers, riveted me to the spot from which I viewed them; but I did not have time to sketch anything. They claim to officiate better here than at Paris. I cannot be the judge as to the truth of their assertion, but they display a religious pomp of which Rennes gave me no idea.

Last Monday we took breakfast with Madame de la Valette. She found dear Mother Theodore perfectly charming, which caused me great joy. You were right in thinking Elvire Payan would want to be a religious. The evening I arrived she received a letter from Aunt Marie, telling her of my departure. She wept bitterly while reading it, and it was I who was consoling her for

[1] Elvire Payan, the sister of Angelina.

[2] Elvire Payan's uncle, pastor of the cathedral. He was humpbacked and had had an attack of paralysis.

my departure; we ended in peals of laughter. You know Elvire. She is more herself than ever. Her sister Marie has not changed at all; she is just as you saw her when she was at Saint Servan. While writing to you I feel as I did when standing before the towers of Saint Gatien—I do not know when to leave you. I have so many things to say! I desire so much to urge you to be good in order to please God, to be gentle with Cecile, to be kind to everybody; but especially I beg you to watch over Clementine, my godchild; help her to save her soul.[1]

To Her Mother

Ruillé, December 9, 1839.

At last I am at Ruillé, my dear mother, this Ruillé of which I was so much afraid at a distance, and which pleases me so much now; yes, pleases me, because here I hope to learn to love God and to esteem myself at my real value. Here also I shall learn absence, which is so difficult a science, especially since it is far from you that it has to be practiced for the first time.

I arrived at Ruillé last Monday night. All the doors were closed. It was not without a throbbing heart that I heard the unfastening of the bolts and saw this vast edifice which, rising before me in the silence of the night, filled my heart with emotion. But the feeling I experienced in the church was deeper still. Mother Theodore took me there. Midnight struck—I had just passed my last day in the world! Oh! I did not regret it. I fell on my knees and wept, and before the altar of God I offered myself entirely, and you, also, my beloved parents. It is here in this chapel, I thought, that in a few short months I shall be clothed in the religious dress. Here I shall find happiness, for here is my God. Then I thought of you, of America, of heaven, of everything. My heart beat so loud that it seemed to me

[1] Irma's letters home may seem more frequent than they really were. She would write a page one day to one, another day to another, and finally send them all together as one letter.

Mother Theodore must have heard it. Poor Mother! doubtless she, too, was touched. She presented to God the companion of her exile, the child of her hope. And besides, she was at Ruillé—Ruillé, the Jerusalem of the Sisters of Providence towards which their thoughts constantly turn. Perhaps I shall feel the same some day. When I found myself alone in my little cell another emotion seized me; but I quickly called on God for help, and I slept tranquilly in His arms.

The next morning I arose at nine o'clock. Shortly after, Mother Theodore presented me to the Superior General, the good Mother Mary of whom I was so much afraid. She is just as Abbé Coëdro described her; she has a severe spiritual look, but after some moments of embarrassment one feels quite at ease with her. I remained with her until noon and found her perfectly delightful. I also saw Sister Saint Charles, whose attraction, the Sisters of Soulaines had told me, no one could resist. For fear of loving her too much, I shall not speak to her again; so, unless the epidemic be in the air, I shall surely escape. As to dear Sister Eudoxie,[1] I intend giving her my heart and soul immediately. This letter is for my beloved father too; you both well know the sincere and devoted affection of your daughter Irma, since yesterday

SISTER SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER.

TO HER SISTER CLEMENTINE

Ruillé, December 12, 1839.

My dear little Clementine: It is here in a large classroom, with a small inkstand inserted in the table, that I write to you. The pupils are numerous, and behold your godmother, your mistress, in the ranks of the battalion. I am not afraid of this warfare. The hours devoted to study are from nine till twelve in the forenoon, and from two till four in the afternoon. From five till six we have geography and pharmacy. I am not

[1] Mistress of Novices.

the less happy for this kind of life; it has infinite charms for me.

If I obtain permission I am going to continue my Latin, for the English-Americans like to dip into everything, and I noticed in an American almanac that Latin is taught in the schools for young ladies. At recreation-time the Sisters intend showing me how to make all sorts of pretty fancy-work, such as pincushions, tapestry, embroidery, etc., etc. You see, Mademoiselle Eugenie, I was right in wishing to make flowers, for now I am obliged to learn how to do so. I forgot my excellent mucilage, and, indeed, I regret it very much. I thought I had left all my distractions at Saint Servan, because at Soulaines I had none; but seven times yesterday I went to a wretched garret instead of going to the room where my clothes are kept. I could have cried for vexation; for I was among the "oppressed," as Madame Foote would say, and half dead from ascending so often.

When you see Abbé le Pailleur,[1] ask him to pray for me. If you forget, you will be obliged to make your prayers longer or you will wrong me. Adieu, my darling godchild.

To Her Sister Pepa

Ruillé, 1839

It did me so much good to get your letter, my dear Pepa. You are calm; for this we must both thank God. I shall receive Holy Communion for you the first Sunday of every month for a whole year. The same evening I shall pray Jesus, our divine Mediator, to intercede for you during the night. You see I have resources. When I leave the chapel to go to bed I say to Jesus: I am going to sleep, but Thou, my good Father, dost never sleep. Intercede for my sister Pepa—or for some one else. You understand what you gain by this.

You ask me what would be found too much in you at

1 Founder of the Little Sisters of the Poor. He was then vicar at Saint Servan and Clementine's confessor.

Ruillé. After close examination I conclude they would cut off a little bit of your tongue. This is all I find. No, I am mistaken, a great number of scruples. You should see how our Mother would make you walk. She would not leave you even the skin of one. In this respect, I was entirely stripped before I came here.

When I see myself in a religious community, reciting Office, I say, "Is it really myself?" I do not know which should astonish me most, the goodness of God who has called me, the patience with which they bear with me, or to see myself in a religious house with inclinations so opposed. Not that they are now contrary to what I see or do, but to what, before coming here, I thought I should have to see and do.

Your sweet vision deeply touched me. Often in my dreams I see you all again, and truly, my dear Pepa, such happy moments are a presage of our future happiness in the arms of God. There we shall be reunited, never again to be separated.

I am spoiling you now, little sister, for you are forgetting some of your old debts; but what matter?

To Her Brother Eugene

Ruillé, 1839.

How much good your letter did me, my dear Eugene. I live with the consoling thought that my cherished child will be a virtuous and perfect Christian. I suffer, but I hope; I suffer, because I must tear myself away from all I love; I hope, because God will take care of you and protect you. I have given Him my joy in this world by separating myself from my darlings. He will return them to me in heaven, where I shall never more leave them. If I die first I shall expect you, and I will ask God to grant me the privilege of placing on your brow the beautiful crown of eternity. It will not wither like the laurel they placed on your head at the distribution of prizes. You will bring me your work, the copybook of your life, a book without blot or erasure. You will have done all for God and for me, and you will say as of

old, "Look, Irma, are you pleased with your child?" How many things we shall have to talk about when we meet again! You will be grown, you will be acquainted with men. They are nearly all wicked, but they are all our brothers, and we must love them and pray for them. I fear the influence that light and irreligious friends may have upon you. Your heart is weak. I remember showing you at harvest time some tall grasses bending with the wind in every direction. Like these grasses, my child, you bend, you yield; but you will be fortunate if, like them, you do not break. Remember amid combats the sweet peace of your soul on the eve and day of your First Communion. Ah! how I wish that the evils which await you might fall upon me! But no, I do not wish it, because some day you will be happy to have suffered for Jesus Christ. At Rennes I saw oxen yoked in pairs to the same plow. Let us both place our heads under the sacred wood of the cross, and we shall have more strength and consolation to draw the heavy cart of human life in the labor of each day.

I wept when I received your good letter, and I weep now while writing to you. A day will come when our tears will be changed into pearls to adorn our crown. But then, if we shed tears, Jesus has shed His Blood. Let us love Jesus who has suffered so much for us. Let us love Him in the sacrament of the Eucharist particularly. May this sacrament be our strength, our refuge, our all, as it is the pledge of our eternal happiness! Poor Clementine is very sad because of my departure. I confide her to both of you. Eugene, Paul, Clementine, my dear children, love one another very much, and sometimes think of your Irma who brought you up with so much tenderness, and who, in her exile, prays daily for you.

To Her Brother Charles

Ruillé-sur-Loir, December, 1839.

I do not forget your kindness to me, but I do not wish to dwell on my sorrow at leaving you. Here the su-

perior tries to reform me, in order, she says, to please that good M. Charles, who desires so much to see his sister like every one else. She is a worthy successor of Mother Theodore in this respect. As to the body, I am an exceptional case: I rise later than my companions; at eight o'clock I go to the kitchen to take some excellent coffee; every evening I find a nice bottle of hot water in my bed; so you see, everywhere the Lord provides charitable persons to take care of me.

Tell my mother not to trouble herself about my hairdressing; here we comb one another, and yesterday I had a great many customers; but on leaving my hands they made so poor an appearance that Sister Eudoxie exempted me in future from this employment.

Irma then tells her brother about losing her purse, and finding it again in the chapel without knowing who had put it there, and she adds:

This time I could say, "Where my treasure is there is my heart," with Jesus in the holy Eucharist. O my God! if I could only give you all as easily as my fortune. O my family! treasure too precious, treasure, too much loved! I offer you a thousand times but always take you back. There are some young persons here whom I pity very much. One of them received from her mother these lines, "Well, my daughter, be happy at Ruillé, since you cannot be happy with us. . . ." Ah! never write me such words. I was happy with you all, but God reserved for me purer and holier joys than the sweet ones of the family. Let us bless Him together.

It has just struck nine o'clock. At this hour, at noon, at three, and at six, we say a prayer to the Heart of Jesus. It is then that I think specially of you, of Henri, and of all my beloved brothers.

Tell little Louis we have some pretty cats here. I shall learn their names soon and then tell him. Like those of Soulaines, they are somewhat familiar. Mother Theodore has a great fondness for cats, dogs, and sailors.

From the letters next introduced we shall see that Mother Mary promptly endeavored to restrain and direct Irma's imagination. With this intention she permitted her neither to read nor write anything which might exalt it; and to detach her from the esteem she had for her own productions, she burned all the papers that the new postulant gave her. Yet, not wishing to deprive her entirely of what had become so necessary to her existence, the kind superior gave her full liberty to satisfy her relatives who entreated her to write long and frequent letters. Her health not permitting her to perform any heavy employment in the novitiate, she had more time to give to her correspondence.[1] The following letters are dated at Ruillé. Later she did not have so much leisure to devote to her family.

To Her Sister Clementine

December, 1839.

I assure you, my good little godchild, that your big letter with all its details interested me very much. Always write the same way; tell me all that passes in your soul. It was very sick before Christmas. I hope God who is so powerful has cured it. And when you see Jesus becoming so little, so humble for love of you, you will not be ashamed to acknowledge that your hat is cotton velvet. O my dear child! look at your Savior's attire; His crown, a crown of thorns; His royal robe, an old purple mantle; His sceptre, a reed which breaks so easily. Now do you not wish to resemble Him? What is the world to you? Jesus Christ has cursed it. Would you wish to please that which God has cursed? True, when I was of your age I was like you. I was angry at having to put on my old woolen dress, and at thirteen I cried a whole evening to obtain permission to

1 To shorten this correspondence, we have suppressed whatever related personally to Irma's brothers and sisters. We also pass over the endearing words with which her letters begin and end.

wear my white dress at the distribution of prizes, when mamma wished me to appear in mourning.

I superintend the recreations here. Sister Eudoxie gave me the charge; it is my only employment. Every Sunday I have the postulants play at some game; sometimes at guessing or finishing a word, sometimes at homonyms, and sometimes at *guersillette,* or even at conjurer. Last Sunday I taught them to play *biribi.* They almost had a fever for fear of losing their chairs. They are unable to amuse themselves without me, and I must say this annoys me somewhat, but I offer it to Our Lord. I am humiliated to think that I am good for nothing but to divert the postulants; but during the week they pay me a hundredfold for their Sunday recreation.

The perfect Adèle of whom I spoke to my sisters is not here, but at Soulaines. She is a very prepossessing child. It is not necessary to say to her, "Adèle, go here, go there, please get me such a thing." If one says "My feet are cold," she quickly brings a foot-warmer. A knock is scarcely heard at the door when she is ready to open it. She is very bright for her age, and one evening when I was giving catechism to the little girls, she astonished me by her penetration and the deep reflections she made on the answers given. I was jealous that this little girl was not my Clementine, or rather that my little godchild did not resemble her; for Adèle is as pious as she is gentle and amiable. She does not look to see whether her plush hat and winter dress are finer than those of her companions. I pray God to make you like her except in one thing—the poor child has epilepsy.

I have also seen some little girls at Ruillé whose copybooks are very neat; there is not a single one written so badly as yours. Here again I am jealous. Now, dear little Clementine, distinguish yourself, first by your goodness, then by your knowledge. Be kind, to please Jesus. You have more merit than another when you smile and are amiable to all, for you were born as dry as an old faggot that has been cut fifteen years.

To Her Sister Eugenie

To-day is Christmas! We had Midnight Mass and our chapel was beautiful. Very touching canticles were sung during some parts of the Masses. God has been very good to me. I was happy, happy even far from Lorette. I was very sad last evening at the recreation, and, being seated near Sister Eudoxie, I spoke to her of you all. She permitted me to go in spirit to embrace you, on condition that I should return for Midnight Mass. At half-past nine we went to make our toilet, and I felt as sad as before. Fortunately, on coming down I met the superior and asked permission to speak to her. She sent me to get the key of her room, which she had in her pocket (this is one of her many distractions), and when I returned to say I could not find it, she was sitting in her room waiting for me. We laughed, then talked, and she allowed me to think of you; but she forbids all thoughts which might excite my imagination, so I write that way no more. I have no other tablet than that of my heart, and its pages do not fill rapidly, for I am like a stone. I have given her the children of my imagination, if such they may be called.[1] I do not know what she will do with them, but she makes such fun of the poor little things that you would pity me.

You know, Eugénie, how I wished to find some one who would make me think, as you made me live. Well, I have met such a one in our Mother. I can say what Paul said the day I asked him, "Who had care of your soul while I was sick?" "Not I, surely," he replied. You know how lazy I am, how easily I trust everything to others. I have nothing now—not a cent, not even my soul. See how free, how detached and despoiled I am! O excellent thing!

Five o'clock P.M.

Admire my exactitude. The bell rang for Vespers and I left you immediately, for yesterday I heard in the

[1] All her writings.

reading that good religious will not even finish a letter half-formed when the bell calls them. Here I am back. I asked a blessing for you and all the others. I offered myself anew to Mary. I am going to live at Bethlehem until the Purification. If you wish to find me, seek me there. I often speak of you, and as usual it is impossible not to praise you. Now in 1840 I must be converted, and limit myself to saying that you knew how to love me and how to spoil me.

To-day we have had roast, dessert, and permission to talk at table. The countess [1] came to spend the feast here. (At last I have learned what is meant by "the room of madame the countess"). They took me to pay her a visit, warning me to hold myself erect, etc. Certainly I was very modest; I did not say four words. It could not be otherwise, for she talked all the time. She is full of wit, but I am sure the devil found it out before I did. She is a diminutive person with very fine manners, and she preserves perfectly all that nature bestowed on her, except what time carries away. Ah, my dear Eugenie, what a mischievous thing time is!—Here the days and hours fly more rapidly than at Saint Servan—Oh! let us go with it, let us pass with it, since it will bear us toward our Ocean, toward God. O Sea, boundless and unfathomable, let our souls be lost in Thee!

To Her Cousin Cecile

Ruillé, January 19, 1840.

More fortunate than I, you are able to concentrate yourself in God, while I feel I must give myself out. I must pour out my heart, I must say, "Let us love God, He is so good." Cecile, I have no one here to encourage, to exhort; every one is better than I am. Old Madeleine [2] was sick the other day and I went to see her. Imagine what a sermon I preached. It brought to my

[1] Countess de Maresco, a benefactor of the Community.
[2] A maid in the convent at Ruillé-sur-Loir.

mind the good old times when I used to console my own dear poor. While thinking of it I wept for joy. Really, there are some days when, if I dared, I would say to the superior, "Permit me, Mother, to preach to you a little." I must be occupied with my soul, and nothing but my soul. It is truly fallow ground, but I must sow in it if I wish to reap in others.

Father Besnoin found me nearly as he left me last summer. I am sure he earnestly recommended that I should be humbled greatly, and he himself did not spare me. He was charming at Ruillé; the postulants wished to keep him to preach a retreat. He gave two little sermons in his own fashion. Saturday evening the carriage was sent to Châtre for him, and Sunday evening at nine o'clock it took him back again. He intends writing to my father to tell him that I am well, though my head is still turned to one side. He found me a poor little woman, as weak as asparagus after it is taken out of boiling water, a creature whom a puff of wind would turn topsy-turvy, etc. He was in his happiest mood. I bit my lips more than once to keep from laughing. He was well received and much liked here. He said his Mass for all the Le Fer family, but he always loves grandmother above all the rest. I thanked God for having sent me the visit of this good old curé; it was a reminder of Saint Servan, a bright ray of sunshine in winter; and, although he stifled my self-love, he did my heart so much good that I felt very happy. I was in my talking mood last Sunday and whatever Father Besnoin may have said, I assure you, Cecile, I was very amiable. . . .

I am glad you saw the "Deluge" painted by Danby. Dear drawing lessons! I do not forget them. Now, Cecile, let us paint Jesus Christ on the canvas of our hearts. He is so beautiful! Let us look at Him in the sweet light of faith, in the pure day of His love. Our brushes are unskillful, our colors dull, our canvas badly stretched, but it is Jesus who is our model. We shall take Him with us to heaven, and the Eternal Father will recognize the cherished image.

To Her Sister Cecile

Ruillé-sur-Loir, January, 1840.

The superior intends going to Saint Servan soon, Cecile. I wish you to speak privately to her. Do not be afraid; you will not suffer more than I did the first time she asked for me. It was on Friday, three days after my arrival. Mother Theodore desired me to go alone, but I became so nervous that she accompanied me. Scarcely had I entered, however, when she withdrew. I thought I should faint, especially when I had to reply to Mother's questions.

You will find me entirely in her, for she has taken my soul, my confidence, and my heart. She said there was no danger of my loving her too much, as she is wicked, ugly and old. Yesterday after dinner I began to think she was right, for she sent one of my letters to the fire, and you may judge whether this pleased me. After I had reflected for a quarter of an hour, however, my judgment approved her act. I do not think she has ever commanded me anything contrary to my reason. Sister Eudoxie has a great partiality for you; she attributes this to your resemblance to me, for I have said ever so much more good of Eugenie. Our Mother says you are my second volume. The other day she held some pictures in her hand and said, "Send this one from me to your sister Cecile, who is a likeness of you."

To Her Sisters

January, 1840.

There arises from nearly all the letters that I have had the happiness to receive a cloud of reproaches that somewhat darken my joy. A cry that goes straight to my heart comes from them, "Write to me." Dear girls, change your pleading and say rather, "Love me." Oh! how easy it would be then for me to satisfy you. You know how I think of you. My poor sinners, Tours, Rennes, Brest, Soulaines, do you not see the demands all these make on my pen? True, dear Pepa, I had put you

among my "afflicted" and so you should have more right to consoling messages than any one else. Oh! why put your heart on the waves and thus lean on a reed so fragile as your Irma? Have courage, dear little sister. There is some in your soul, but still more in the Heart of Jesus. There you will be consoled.

Adieu, beloved sisters. Thank for me a thousand times those dear friends who have written. Tell them my heart is theirs; and believe me, my dear ones, you have not left it a single instant.

To Her Sister Pepa

What you told me in your last letter, dear Pepa, made me pray that God may enlighten you. It does not seem to me necessary that you know your vocation now. Truly, though I was not troubled about mine, God provided for it. I used to say every day, "Lord, Thy Holy Will be done in me," and I never troubled myself as to how this would take place. For the present, you need only occupy yourself in fulfilling your duties as an obedient daughter, as sister, friend, and especially as Christian and sodalist; all this with the pure and single intention of pleasing God.

To Her Sister Cecile

How I wish you were here, my little girl, to give your sick watch to Mother Mary to regulate. She understands perfectly how to repair this changeable watch, the imagination. She found many broken springs in mine, I assure you, for in me as in you, everything was a little out of fix in body and soul. You tell me, dear child, that you wish you had a religious vocation. You know that it is indeed a greater grace than to go to Rome, to Jerusalem, to Vincennes. Yes, it is a grace that surpasses all thought, and for which I would willingly suffer again all that I underwent last summer. You may think, perhaps, that I am swimming in an ocean of sensible consolations. Oh! no indeed, dear Cecile; some-

times my heart is as cold as the weather. Yet I am happy, because I am where God wills me to be, and because I know that by obeying I am pleasing God, and what more is needed to be happy? Pray much to the Blessed Virgin to watch over you, so that if some day God calls you to the religious life you will bring Him a pure and innocent heart. To keep one's innocence is perhaps a still greater grace than to be a religious. Lastly you must pray a great deal to the Holy Spirit to show you the way in which you should walk to go to Heaven. You will offer to God your annoyances, my absence, and that dreadful catechism that gives you so much trouble. I think the demon of pride must have leaped at your throat and strangled you on Sunday, as he did Eve.[1] Finally, is it so great a misfortune if you do not speak very well? If there were but one child, the smallest, the least prepossessing whom you could prevent from committing not only mortal sin but even a venial sin, would you not have spent your time much better than if you had founded Rome or Athens? Apply yourself, then, to God's work with patience, courage, and love. Oh! how God loves you when you do not succeed. You work and humble yourself. He asks no more. What destroyed the merit of my work at Saint Servan was the value I attached to actions; in truth there are neither great nor small before God. What raises and lowers them is the affection of the heart. Let us love much and all will be great. I do not wish to lose one moment of my occupation. I offer all to God, even the way I make my bed. Do the same, dear Cecile; thus one acts tranquilly, every thing is the same, one is no longer disquieted. I am glad that you are reading Saint Francis de Sales. I am reading him too, and Louis of Granada also, who is very good, I assure you. Love always the sister who loves you so much.

[1] Response of one of the children of the catechism class to the question, "What happened to Eve after having listened to the serpent?" "He gave her an apple to eat and it strangled her."

To a Friend Undecided Regarding Her Vocation

Ruillé, February 18, 1840.

. . . My dear friend, leave this state. Consider what the Magi did; when their star disappeared they inquired of the Synagogue. You have also lost your star, or rather perhaps you have not found it. Go then, to the Church. "Show yourself to the priests." There are some very learned ones at Rennes. Had I been guided by my own light I should not be here. I thought I had not even the shadow of a vocation to the religious life. My tastes, my love of liberty, all seemed an obstacle which I did not care to surmount. Yet, like you, I wished to belong to God, though I was not, like you, undecided about my future. I did not think a higher destiny awaited me than to remain in the world and do good there. I was satisfied; but God wished me to belong entirely to Him. One day He raised doubts in my soul, the next day I made them known. You know the rest. I should like you to partake of my happiness; it all consists in obedience. I have an excellent superior. I tell her simply all that goes on in my soul. At first these avowals cost me much, but now I could not sleep quietly if there were anything on my heart which I had not the courage to tell. O my dear Marie, if you were here she would unlock your strong box, not as a thief to steal your treasure, but as a wise administrator to utilize the riches that you bury in the depths of your soul—riches of which God will demand an account, and for which, if you continue, you will have but this answer to give: "Lord, I have heard that you are severe. I was afraid, and for this reason I buried my treasure, lest I should lose it."

To Her Mother

Ruillé, February 29, 1840.

You do well, my beloved mother, to claim your rights; you have some on my pen, as well as on my heart. You will never lose the latter, however great may be the

crowd; but as to writing, I do like Gauthier,[1] I serve the worst first. Many thanks for all the interesting details. You give me so faithful an account of everything that I seem to be still at home. These little journeys of my imagination and heart do not injure me. My superior, who understands my nature, often gives me permission to see you in spirit, and even to embrace you tenderly. She also loved her family. Ah! if you knew what a difference between the reality of her heart and the terrible person of whom I dreamed. What a strong woman she is in character, and how tender in soul! She finds you "terribly" Christian to have consented to my departure; she often speaks to me of you. She knows no other interests than those of God; earthly things are nothing to her. With admirable generosity she gets me all I need. You see, my cherished mother, God does not abandon us.

. . . . . .

I think Sister Superior will go to Brittany in May; you will be very much pleased to see her. She often inquires whether I write to you, for she says, "The poor mothers are always so uneasy; they are never satisfied." I like to think you will receive some grace for the sacrifice we have made together, because you have perhaps contributed more to it than I have. The other day when reading this verse of Saint John, *God so loved the world that He gave His only Son,* I said to myself: Oh! yes, it has cost the Father more to give us His only Son than it cost Jesus to die for us; for if it were not thus Saint John would have said, Jesus Christ has so loved the world that he died to save it. Then I recalled Marie's [2] childish remark, "Dear Irma, our good God can refuse you nothing, since you gave Him all." Why, then, I said, if He can refuse me nothing when I offer myself to Him, though I am full of defects, will He not grant all to His Son when He prays for us—He who is innocent and who sacrificed Himself with such generosity and

[1] A tradesman patronized by the family.

[2] Her cousin, Marie de la Salle.

love? My dearest mother, reflect a little on this comforting thought; it has filled me with courage, and I believe it will give you much consolation.

To Her Sister Elvire

February, 1840.

You say, my dear little Elvire, that it is impossible for you to be good, since you would be so only to be praised. That would, it is true, be a very poor motive; but if you cannot have a better one, begin anyhow to correct yourself, and then you will sanctify your motives. You are now at an age when the passions will rush upon you with terrible impetuosity. You are almost fifteen years old. O my dear child, what will become of you? Throw yourself into Mary's arms.

The love of reading, of amusing conversation, perhaps, too, the love of pleasure, the germ of which is in you, will soon develop; then that miserable vanity which you have, although it has not yet shown itself much. Every one has it. They used to think I had none of it; but even at your age I felt the desire of pleasing, and once I remember (I was fourteen years old and it was springtime), I made myself a garland of flowers. My hair was curled, and with my wreath I thought I was charming; and I am sure others, too, found me pretty. Whenever I passed before a mirror in the *salon,* I stopped to admire myself; but on going upstairs to my room, and seeing my crucifix with my Jesus crowned with thorns, I threw myself before it, cast aside my garland, and wept. I told Our Lord that I wished to be beautiful only in His eyes. Oh! I was so happy afterwards.

Elvire, you will experience the same happiness if the approving looks of Jesus and Mary suffice for you. You are their cherished daughter, and the angels in speaking of you call you "sister." Take care of your heart and your innocence; work, study, and tell me everything that happens to you.

To Her Father

Ruillé, March 3, 1840.

Although we are busily engaged in occupations of all kinds, my dear father, I wish to say a little word of tenderness to you; I shall help the others later. Already I have filled a page in my copybook, and it looks very well. It makes me laugh to see myself a pupil again; and I say to myself, it is indeed very true that to gain the kingdom of heaven we must become as little children. Besides, I had a strong inclination, as you know, to remain a little girl, to be petted. I must be very weak yet, seeing all the care, all the tenderness, our good God lavishes on me. He has given to every one here a tendency to love me and do me good. From the superior, who strengthens my soul, to old Madeleine, who attends to the cows and to my feet, there is a chain of watchful charity for your Irma. To be your daughter brings me good fortune, as Abbé Coëdro so well said.

You must have received a letter from Father Besnoin. He intends preaching the Forty Hours at Saint Servan, having received an invitation from the rector of that town through the most amiable, the most charming letter he ever saw in his life. "It was tender," he said to me. I made him promise to keep it carefully. . . .

I have sketched Ruillé for you. You will be glad to see the house occupied by my body, for my heart yet resides, by right and by deed, at Saint Servan. I suppose you are as thin as ever, and perhaps you will be obliged to do like our chaplain. The other day he had a swollen face; not being able to get fat, he thought a swelling would do as well. I find a great similarity between his preaching and Abbé Cardonnet's talks to his sodalists. He gives us catechism once a week. Last Sunday I was terribly ashamed. Whenever the postulants could not answer he would call "Sister Irma." Being carried away by the love of truth, I made some objections to what he had explained; but it seemed they produced only amusement, for a burst of general laughter followed. He himself could not say another word,

and our Mother said if I continued she would be obliged to leave the room. Imagine how comfortable I was! He told me that the Church had spoken, and of course I submitted. It seems to me, however, that it is said, "Our Lord grew in grace and wisdom, really as man, before God and man." Please ask Abbé Cardonnet whether I have been dreaming.

To Her Grandmother

Ruillé, March 19, 1840.

My beloved Grandmother:

> The Feast of Saint Joseph, we joyfully say,
> Is in truth the most beautiful festival day.

Although it is a long while since Cousin Henri sang you these lines, and neither of us is there to embrace you, this will not prevent my adding, as of old,

> It is, I believe, a feast for all;
> To celebrate it, all prepare.

Yes, at Ruillé as at Lorette, on earth as well as in heaven, everywhere this is a beautiful day. Here it is celebrated with great solemnity, for good Saint Joseph is the patron of the community. We are making a novena to him, and I have just for the first time in my life, been copying music for a beautiful Mass to be sung in his honor. No doubt it is owing to his help that I had but one crooked note. I wish that you, who are one of Saint Joseph's friends and so intimate with him, would settle a dispute between Sister Eudoxie and myself about your patron. She maintains that Saint Joseph was a good, simple man, common-looking, and not gentlemanly in appearance; I, on the contrary, declare that, in spite of his plain clothing, the royal blood of David could be recognized in him, and that his appearance was impressed with majestic goodness. I am sorry to differ thus from Sister Eudoxie, for I love her much, and on all other points we agree. A word from you, dear grandmamma, will make me adopt her opinion or give me courage to sustain mine.

To-day I seem to be again at that dear Lorette where, doubtless, you are all gathered together. I, too, am there, and I wish you a happy feast. I embrace you; I wish you to be very obedient in regard to your health and not remain too long in your chapel. I ask Abbé Cardonnet whether you take your broth, and also your cream in the evening, regularly and without grumbling. And then I would like to know whether you are pleased with all your children and grandchildren. Are the two old ones,[1] as you begin to call them, sensible for their age? Do they not wish to keep too strict a Lent, to fast as if they were strong, to go out in spite of wind and rain? The first time your daughter Jeanne goes to sleep, her head supported on her thumb, I beg you to waken her with a good pinch of snuff; you are obliged to do it, dear grandmamma, because children must be corrected. I dare not set any penance for Aunt Marie, because she is my godmother; still, it would not be amiss to impose on her the recitation of some *Paters* and *Aves* for her godchild. You must put us in a state to be sincere when we sing:

> We branchlets of these blessed vines
> Shall by our actions tell,
> From age to age, the virtues fair
> You practiced here so well.

After this stanza I embrace you, dear grandmamma, and return to Ruillé, begging our Lord to bless you and leave you yet a long time with us, to be the happiness of all your children and grandchildren, present and future; for you are the "protecting tree." Love, then, and protect by your prayers the poor branch so far away from you, your granddaughter, Irma.

To Her Aunt Mademoiselle le Fer de la Motte, at Lorette

Ruillé, March 22, 1840.

It is a long, a very long time, my dear aunt, since I have written to you, but you are one of the elders of the

[1] Her two eldest daughters, Jeanne and Marie.

family, and therefore one of the most reasonable. It is true there is no age for the heart. The superior and I repeat this very often. Unfortunately I feel it every day; and you, more than any one else, feel it at your own expense, so I cannot expect more of you than of any other member of the family. All I can say to console those to whom I write so seldom is, that my most frequent and fervent prayers are for them. I say to God, like Job, but in another sense, "Lord, answer for me."

The Feast of Saint Joseph was celebrated here with great pomp. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the morning, and Benediction was given in the evening as on grand festivals; for Saint Joseph is one of our patrons.

I suppose your chapel at Nazareth is entirely finished, and the workmen no longer interrupt the prayers of pious souls. How do you conduct your little bark? You are now on the good way, on the sure road of the humble. Well, my dear aunt, rejoice to be useless in your own eyes. I would give all the gold in the world to consider myself in that way; but, unfortunately, I have abominable pride. I entreat you to beg God to drive this pride away, for I have a great horror of it, since it is the worst deceiver in the world. Our life is not like gold, which gets its value where it is employed, being worth twenty-five times more in France than in Peru. In the sight of God places and employments are nothing. All, emphatically all, consists in purity of intention. I begin now to understand it a little, though formerly this was not a favorite subject of my wandering meditations.

Give me all the news of your heart, that heart which causes all your misery. It seems to me you should be better now, for I believe that at my departure you laid your surplus of sensitiveness on me. However that may be, I must acknowledge that I never had more than now, and it is the only thing that makes me regret being your godchild. After all, it is a gift of God that must not be despised nor ill-treated, and it will contribute much to embellish our crowns.

To Her Sister Cecile

March 23, 1840.

I seem to see you, my dear Cecile, disputing with Father Besnoin. He was right to enlighten you by saying that a novice is nothing more nor less than a pane of glass in a community. Nothing is more easily replaced. Since the retreat, fourteen who believed themselves called have not been chosen. I assure you no one is proud here. I, for one, am not; each instant we tremble, fearing to get our "walking-papers." Once, in particular my dread was so great that when the superior called me to her room my knees shook and I could scarcely utter a sound. To be quickly relieved from this anxiety I confessed how frightened I was. . . . I had already prepared in my mind the strongest reasons to induce them to keep me: If I am not capable of teaching a class, if I am not strong enough to take care of the sick, well, I am willing to scrape the carrots and peel the potatoes. I would have said all this, Cecile, and all this on my knees, weeping, so that my superior would not have had the heart to send me away. Perhaps you do not understand this. But ask David; he said, like me, with a good heart, "My God, I would rather be the least in Thy house than the greatest anywhere else." O my dear sister! to belong to God, to God alone, this is so great a happiness that the anticipation alone makes my soul palpitate with joy.

I am telling Elvire of my musical triumphs. It seems that our drawing-master's axiom, "Who will, can," does not apply to music. In vain did I raise my head to take high *mi,* and lower my chin to get the bass notes; my efforts were greeted by general bursts of laughter. Ah! if Elvire had been more patient, I might perhaps one day have attained success. But now it is all over. I have given up hope.

CHAPTER IX

IRMA MUST REMAIN IN FRANCE

AS may be gleaned from the preceding letters, Irma was not long at Ruillé before she appreciated the advantage of the religious life. She intended, however, merely to begin her novitiate in France, for she hoped to finish it in America under Mother Theodore, who was to leave for Indiana in June, 1840. After Irma had spent some months in the community, Mother Mary found her health so delicate that she did not consider her able to bear the hardships to be endured by pioneers in the American forests; fearing it would even endanger Irma's life, the good superior told her she must not think of leaving with the first band. "Send me, Mother," Irma entreated; "if I die, what is the difference? I shall be a martyr." "And," rejoined the superior, "what shall I be? The executioner. I should not like to deserve that title."

Nevertheless, Mother Mary, seeing in her postulant all the marks of a solid vocation, said to her: "Even should your health not permit you to fulfill any duty, any employment, and you are obliged to remain always in bed, that will not exclude you from religious profession." And this good Mother who, as Irma said, knew no other interest than the glory of God, refused to accept any dowry.

The letters which announced to Madame le Fer that Irma could not be of the number of those who were to

leave for America, caused the deepest anxiety to her mother-heart. She would be happy to keep her daughter in France, if such were the will of God; but all whom she had consulted agreed that God called Irma to America; and, besides, Irma had gone to Ruillé for that purpose only.

Although the Sisters of Providence had for several years taken care of the sick at Saint Servan, Irma had had very little personal intercourse with them. Had she desired to become a religious in France, she would not have thought of Ruillé-sur-Loir, even the name of which she had probably never heard until Bishop Hailandière's change of plan made her acquainted with the community. Now, since the only design which had conducted her to this community could not be executed, was it not her parents' duty to call her home, where, far from all influence, she might leisurely examine a vocation so different from her first project? Should they allow her, in a moment of imprudent fervor, to contract engagements which later might become an insupportable yoke for her? If she must remain in France, perhaps she could find another Order more in accordance with her habits and tastes.

These objections and many others presented themselves to the minds of Irma's parents, and found but too strong an echo in their hearts. That their daughter would remain in France was a consoling thought, but, being accompanied by anxiety and doubt, it caused them no real satisfaction till Irma wrote the following letter, in which she disclosed the motives that determined her to remain in the community of the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir:

To Her Mother

Ruillé, May, 1840.

In your letter you proposed that I return home to examine my vocation. Do not doubt the pleasure I should have in seeing you all, in listening to your counsels, and in uniting my prayers to yours to ask God to direct me. But here in solitude I think I can better speak to Him and consult Him, since I live with Him. Oh! do not fear. He loves me tenderly. He will permit no evil to befall me. And then, when I place flowers on Mary's altar, I repose sweetly at her feet, I consult her, I listen to her, I love her still more than my superior. Consequently, my dear mother, she is the only one of whom you can be jealous, yes, of Mary, and of no one else.

You ask whether I desire to enter another Order. I answer, No. Last summer being unable to choose for myself, I begged God to select for me a religious Order in which I might save my soul and love Him more. He did not will it to be in the community of Alsace. Now that He has brought me here almost in spite of myself, after I had consulted Abbé Coëdro on this final step, I feel that it is here He wants me. True, there are older communities, and many which are better known, but this is the one God has selected for me. It is His Providence they adore here. "Providence of God, repose of the heart! Providence of God, the way of heaven! Providence of God, calm in the tempests!" Every day we say this, and I repeat with all my heart, Providence of God, for me the way of heaven, I abandon myself to Thee; I rest in Thy arms.

Shall I ever go to America? Shall I remain in France? I know not. God knows; that suffices. Since He is my guide, it is not necessary that I should know the road. From the moment He takes on Himself the charge of me I have no need to know what path will lead me to heaven. This state of abandonment is conformable to my confiding character. When I was at home I never felt uneasy or anxious about myself, for

I was with good parents; and now it would be very strange if I had any disquietude about my future, being the beloved child of a rich and generous Father. O my dear mother! do not trouble yourself about me; my portion is excellent.

It is true that sometimes my nature resists when I think of Vincennes and of you, but my heart enjoys a profound peace. There is in the depths of my being something that I never felt before, and it is this something which I beg God to give you and my dear father, for it is worth all the wealth of the world. This does not prevent my praying that the baths may restore his health. My beloved father! I would wish him to enjoy every blessing; that would not be too much to satisfy my love.

It was about the end of February that I learned the decision of the Mother General relative to my departure.

The hearts of mothers and those of their children are often brought into contact without any magnetism, and thus you can read in mine that it needs your prayers. Pray, then, my dear parents, until I write you again. Thanks; it is enough.

She wrote to her sisters also, who, forgetting themselves in their tenderness, saw only what was painful for her in this decision of the superior, whom they accused of being arbitrary.

To Pepa and Cecile

Ruillé, 1840.

Truly, my dear sisters, you have excellent hearts and many good qualities; but there was not a grain of politeness in your last letters. You say it was because I was grieved that you acted thus. Well, let me tell you, my most lively sorrow was caused by seeing that you repay the immense goodness they show me here by reproach and sharp complaint. My heart was torn and my tears were more bitter than those I shed on learning that I

could not go to America this year. I saw in this decision the manifest will of God. I did not for an instant think of a human will. I did not hesitate one moment, for God said to me interiorly that He wished me to wait. But to-day it is in vain I say to myself, It is God again who permits this affliction. I still see it comes to me from my sisters, and directs itself toward the disinterested heart of *my mother*. Oh! was it this I should have expected from you? Do you think every letter I write you is untruthful, and that the tender affection shown me is real on paper only? Did not Father Besnoin repeat the same thing to you? Do you not believe in the power and goodness of God to change my will? Do you not think His love will suffice for Irma, since He alone will be the eternal felicity of her being? *Si scires donum Dei*—if you knew the gift of God, if you knew what peace, what calm, what ardor He diffuses into the soul! *Si scires donum Dei!* But how can you understand a religious vocation when I, in the midst of my former transports, could not for an instant imagine it? Adore, then, in silence, my poor sisters. I am an incomprehensible mystery to myself, and I can only repeat in an excess of gratitude, "The Lord has done great things to me," because He is all-powerful. We must not confine God's views to our views. He changes His works and does not change His designs. What matters the place? The glory of a creature is not attached to one place more than another on this earth, which in His sight is not larger than a grain of sand; but what is of importance is to accomplish well the will of God our Creator and to draw on ourselves His love.

Perhaps I, too, am allowing myself to be carried away by the impulse of the moment. Pardon me, dear sisters, if I have pained you, but I must tell you that I have been wounded to the quick. Pardon me. Promise me that you will say a *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for my remaining in France. From the first moment I arrived here I foresaw that God would demand this of me, and more than two months ago the superior positively de-

clared it to me. I am very calm now; I do not weep any more. I hope to go to see you some day soon at Saint Servan, and then we shall again have a good laugh together.

My fondest love to every one. I think of you all every day. I love you with all my soul; and if anything could trouble my happiness it is your obstinacy in not believing your *happy* sister, Irma.

Charles is good; he has written, my superior tells me, a very fine letter of thanks to her. He is entirely pleased with the Sisters, and his feelings of resentment against them are gone forever. This gives me great pleasure.

To Her Sister Pepa

Ruillé, April, 1840.

We should always serve the Lord with joy, and your cheerfulness is a very holy contagion; besides, a joyous soul is less subject to scruples, and judges its neighbors more favorably, and extricates itself from a thousand miseries. Continue, my dear sister, even if papa teases you for it.

Marie Angelina often asks me to talk about you, especially since our superior said that you resembled her. The postulants thought you were called Pepin; yesterday only I rectified that mistake. I love all my Sisters very much; they are so good, so obliging. But I am sorry that nineteen of the oldest will leave us in a few days. They are delighted when I tell them some of your anecdotes, among others the "Peck of Oats," given by Father Besnoin. I believe it took away their desire of having a similar treat. Well, my dear little sister, be good for the sake of papa and the rest, but above all to please our dear Lord, for the interior must resemble the exterior. Oh! how good it is to love Him! How beautiful He is! He will not die, nor will He leave us, unless we drive Him away; and even then He returns and knocks at the door of our hearts. Give yourself up, therefore, with simplicity and confidence, to our Savior; be His dear child. He has given you so many

graces. He wishes you to belong entirely to Him in simplicity and love. We are both in His Sacred Heart; there embrace your Irma. Thanks for your charming needle-case; it was high time it came, for according to my old practice I was beginning again to steal. Your present caused general joy.

The "Peck of Oats," of which Irma speaks pleasantly in several letters, requires an explanation.

While Father Besnoin was giving the Lenten Station at Saint Servan, Mademoiselle Pèpa le Fer, who enjoyed his instructions very much, desired to have him for her director. In spite of her natural cheerfulness and great gayety she was often troubled with scruples, and she hoped this Father would give her spiritual consolation. She was advancing too slowly in the service of God, she said, and in order to progress more rapidly she wished to give her soul a "peck of oats" (a spiritual feast).

As Father Besnoin had many penitents, it was not until after two or three unsuccessful attempts to speak to him that Mademoiselle Pèpa found a favorable moment to present herself. Father Besnoin was excellent in bringing back sinners to God; the most culpable were best adapted to his zeal, and the deeper the soul was steeped in guilt, the more zealous did the good priest show himself. To decide as to a vocation, to reconcile enemies, to help a soul out of a difficult position—all this suited him; but he looked upon it as a loss of time, particularly at the end of Lent, to assume the direction of a person who was leading not merely a Christian but even a really pious life. He therefore rather gruffly received Mademoiselle le Fer.

"What! you here again?" he said to her.

"But, Father, this is my first time here."

"Yes, yes; but I saw you. You have been prowling in the church around my confessional. You come to steal the time that belongs to my poor sinners. It is wrong. It is very wrong."

"But, Father—"

"Oh! yes, you are going to excuse yourself. You are proud, full of self-love. You do not wish to be thought in the wrong."

Mademoiselle le Fer, much confused, began to cry. "Oh! that is good," said the Father. "Now for the tears, the nerves! Are you not nervous?"

"Yes, Father."

"And of course you fast?"

"Yes, Father, as it is Lent."

"I forbid you to fast. Go tell your mamma that she must give you a cup of chocolate." And with this the Father closed the grating.

Mademoiselle Pepa returned home with a heavy heart; but later she laughingly related the spiritual treat this good Father had given her, and the recital, heightened by her imitation of him, was the delight of her brothers and sisters, who often reminded her of the "Peck of Oats."

To Her Sister Eugenie

Ruillé, May, 1840.

I have just received a letter from Elvire Payan. She has learned from you that I am to remain in France, and she scolds me a little for being silent on this subject; but I intended to tell her as soon as she should arrive.

I am all alone. The others have gone out for a walk; the distance being too great for me, Sister Eudoxie told me to remain at home. I assure you this did not disappoint me, as I have begun a good little conversation with you. If I were at Saint Servan we should now be

sitting on the wooden trunk eating our Sunday apple. Poor little cherished mother, how often we have chatted there together.

Oh! how happy we shall be in Paradise. There we shall rest for an everlasting Sunday. I seem to be with you already at the feet of the Blessed Virgin, for you secured your place there long ago. How happy our Blessed Mother will be to have her two daughters near her! As I am always afraid she loves you better than me, I am going to increase in fervor, that she may love us both equally. Our entire Office is in her honor. If I take advantage of all the prayers addressed to her here, I shall find many opportunities of praising her.

Kiss dear Cecile and Pepa very tenderly for me. I am afraid I pained them by my last letter, and I am uneasy about it. Dearly loved sisters, you are all in my heart. I very often ask God to reward you for all you have done for me, for I fear I did very little for you. But I shall say no more; your soul understands mine. I shall continue the same silence, a silence which I cannot break without shedding tears.

You have been, like me, dear Eugenie, very happy during these beautiful feasts, for we have had permission to communicate oftener, and when we possess Jesus we have all. This loving Jesus spoils me. He allows me to be always like a child with Him, and I intend never to grow old, but always to remain His little daughter, Mary's, and yours also, my Eugenie—yes, always your daughter, Irma.

To Her Aunt Mademoiselle Jeanne le Fer de la Motte

Ruillé, June, 1840.

I cannot better make up for my long silence than by wishing you a happy feast; for Saint John's day is coming, and despite my poor memory, a family weakness, I do not forget that great Saint John is your patron. I shall receive Holy Communion for you on that day, and shall ask God to give you a great love for Him in

the sacrament of the Eucharist; for it seems to me if we had this love and a lively faith there could be no evil which we would not overcome.

O my dear aunt! what a great grace God has bestowed on me in bringing me here. How happy I am! I am beginning to open my eyes and to see another world, another future. It is true that while at Saint Servan I desired to love and serve God; but I mistook my tastes and the impetuosity of my character for virtue. I wished my will to be God's will. I fancied my poor little talents would be of great service to the Lord in aiding Him to do His work. How absurd! As if He had not made the world out of nothing, as if He had not converted it by twelve fishermen! O my dear aunt! I am so ashamed of my pride. How I regret having spent so much time in reading, talking, and discussing, and so little in praying! It is not my superiors that have shown me my error; it is the Holy Ghost alone, and I tell you this that you may thank Him.

I know how highly the world prizes knowledge and intellect; but I do not speak to the world; I speak to you, you who know that God dwells with the humble, and that He makes use of the lowly to confound the strong. It does me good to speak openly to you and to tell you all that passes in my heart. I love to think that you, too, belong to Jesus and Mary; that with all your soul you love His divine providence, the attribute specially honored in the Order I intend entering. It is so comforting to abandon oneself to God, and to sleep peacefully in His arms. On the fourth day of each month I offer for your intentions all my prayers and actions.

In 1840 Mother Mary visited the various houses of the Sisters of Providence in Brittany, and while in Saint Servan she called upon Irma's father and mother. Irma was not without misgivings regarding the interview. On the one hand, she feared that the superior's

motives for keeping her in France were not fully understood by her family, particularly by her sisters; and, on the other hand, she feared that Mother Mary might feel a little coldness toward those who had misconstrued her good intentions. It was with great joy that Irma learned of the mutual feelings of kindness to which Mother Mary's visit gave rise.

To Her Father

Ruillé, June 16, 1840.

I was very anxious, my dearest father, about your interview with our Reverend Mother. I was imagining all the questions you would put to her and the replies she would make, when, suddenly turning my head I saw her at my side. I caught hold of her hands, but knew not whether I was at Saint Servan or she at Ruillé. I assure you, my dear father, never did reality seem more like a dream. In a few days this apparition will vanish, and then I can follow her amongst you. If she could put me into her pocket like a snuff-box, how I should jump! How soon I should be in your arms! But I can love you and be happy without being at Saint Servan. We Christians have other places than space; our souls meet in God; there we see each other. If you only knew, my father, how much good it does me to pray for you! I should think myself presumptuous were it not to our good God that I address myself. Imagine my asking Him that you may not go to Purgatory even for a single day, and a thousand other things of this kind; but He is so powerful and so good that I dare ask Him anything.

I receive Holy Communion for you the second Tuesday of each month. I trust that occasionally you offer one of your Sunday Communions for me, when Abbé Sauvage [1] is at Lorette, because for you to walk as far

[1] Monsieur le Fer's confessor.

as the hospital, weak as you are, would be, I think, too much of a triumph over your dear "laziness." By the way, do you not know that to make peace among combatants, one must have a great deal of strength? My dear father, you are not much stronger than I, and can you imagine me as trying to separate three butchers who are fighting? I am joking now, but indeed I became pale while reading Cecile's letter, to think you had been struck and insulted in such a manner; then I blushed on reflecting that I had read a thousand times, without being touched, the outrages Jesus endured for me during His Passion. Oh! I do not wish hereafter to be insensible to my Savior's sufferings.

I thank you for permitting me to remain in the religious Order God has chosen for me. It is indeed too beautiful for me; as I am worth so little, it would be necessary to found a special one humbler than the clay to suit my level.

During the stay of the Mother General in Brittany, and after her visit to Saint Servan, Irma wrote:

To Her Sister Pepa

Ruillé, July, 1840.

I was happy to receive your letter and Mother Mary's also. I am glad you appreciate her, notwithstanding all your prejudices. She says you are very cheerful, but that Eugenie is thin enough to disconcert one. I quote her expressions. I am sure you asked her many questions and the name of Irma rang out in the air more than once. We must thank God for all this happiness, for it is He that sends it. I had some fears concerning the interview; but I told the Blessed Virgin to arrange all. See how she has heard me. I have an extraordinary power over the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, so much so that I scarcely dare ask a superfluous thing for fear of being taken at my word. You laugh, perhaps, but you ought not to be surprised, as Our Lord,

who cannot lie, has said, "Whatsoever you ask the Father in my name shall be granted to you." Well, when I am not gratified immediately, I say to the good God, "If I asked this of my father and mother, they would surely grant it if possible." So you understand, God cannot be less generous, and I get what I desire. You must have felt somewhat the effect of my prayers. I offer the eleventh day of each month for you and the ninth for Eugenie. Please offer these same days for my intentions; that will be another link between us.

I am glad your soul is calm. Try to profit by this to communicate often. Weak creatures like us need a support. I assure you there is no more salutary remedy than devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Without fasts, without great mortifications, we reach the goal, which is to love God and to do His holy will. Believe me, and take this in all confidence.

Mother Mary says she found little Louis [1] very gentle and very good, and that she was charmed with him; that he still throws himself with all the simplicity of his age, into the arms of all who will take him. This was rather a subtle hint for his sister Irma, whose hands and arms have been cut off since she is here; but the remarks about little Louis have given me great pleasure, and make me

1 Little Louis was scarcely eight years old when Irma wrote these lines. As he was the Benjamin of a large family, and very delicate, he was the spoiled child of his mother. With all his good qualities he was subject to a fault which was the despair of his brothers and sisters. For the least contradiction, and even for none at all, little Louis groaned and screamed for whole hours. There would be no tears on his fresh, rosy cheeks, yet his screams would continue, and the willful child, thanks to the four stairways of the house, would run up and down, while the family, almost breathless, heard the voice, without ever being able to catch its owner. Sometimes his father would put him into the street. Here he hushed *subito,* and, to avoid remarks of the passers-by, would crawl along the wall and return home. When in the evening Irma would ask him if his conscience did not reproach him with anything, Louis would reply, "Oh! it is so disagreeable to have a conscience." His father began to employ another means to correct him; this was the "journal" of Louis's life. The family met once a week for the reading of his notes and to decide whether he should be rewarded or punished. But phrases like this, "For two hours Louis screeched like an owl and boohooed like a calf," covered him with confusion and proved his greatest punishment. Gradually the good father obtained the amendment so earnestly desired.

hope for his entire conversion. Elvire, she says, is still only a child, but my Clementine is very reasonable. Finally she described her visit to my grandmother, their little quarrel and reconciliation, which ended with the kiss of peace. She talked a long time of my father, "so esteemed and so loved in his native city." I have no doubt that our good Mother caught the contagion.

CHAPTER X

MOTHER THEODORE GOES TO AMERICA—FOUNDATION OF SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

THE date fixed for the departure of the Sisters of Providence for America was approaching. In consideration of the immense distance separating the new foundation from the Mother House, Monseigneur Bouvier, Bishop of Le Mans and Ecclesiastical Superior of the Congregation, had made an agreement with Bishop de la Hailandière of Vincennes, as to the authority Mother Theodore should henceforth possess, and the manner of observing in America several points of the Rule. Mother Theodore was sent as foundress, and remained the Superior General of the Sisters of Providence in Indiana until her death, May 14, 1856.

Mother Theodore went to Ruillé to spend the fortnight preceding her departure. She was to take with her five religious; one of them, Sister Olympiade, had belonged to the establishment of Soulaines. Nothing, however, could soften the regret this good superior felt in not having Irma. In her plans and projects of departure she had pictured everything as shared by this dear daughter. Like another Ignatius called to bear the seeds of the Gospel to distant lands, must she be deprived of her Francis Xavier? Together they had formed their pious plans for the mission; together they were to have cultivated the still virgin soil of Indiana, and to have gathered the harvest of living wheat for the granary of their Heavenly Father.

With her warm imagination and her heart overflowing with youth and love, Irma could paint in the colors of hope, the pangs of separation and exile. Like a brilliant sunbeam penetrating the luxuriant and somber forests of the New World, her fancy could clothe the bare trunks, the reeds, the creeping vines, and the pale flowerets with a thousand delightful tints, and give them perfume and beauty. But the sacrifice in all its nudity appeared to Mother Theodore. At the meridian of life she saw herself obliged to break every habit, to say good-by to her country and her religious family. She could not open her soul to her young friend, and her frank nature suffered from this silence and from Irma's sweet resignation. Thus did God present to her lips the chalice which He offers to His elect, and which He Himself drank to the very dregs. It is thus that God fashions the soul. Though the sacrifice caused suffering to Mother Theodore's loving heart, it did not shake her resolution. The faint clear whisper of grace alone is more powerful with a faithful soul than all the voices of nature.

Irma's letters show how deep was her emotion on seeing again this beloved Sister, from whom she was so soon to be separated, uncertain whether she should ever enjoy the happiness of rejoining her. She endeavors, however, to hide her grief from her mother.

July, 1840.

I have had the pleasure, my beloved mother, of again seeing my dear Mother Theodore. I cannot tell you what feelings agitated us. We are very reasonable, however, hoping to see each other again next year. I must strengthen myself and submit with patience. Mother Mary has seen you, I trust, and has told you of the approaching departure of our Sisters. Those dear

Sisters! My heart will follow them over the ocean and afterwards as far as their dear mission at Vincennes. Excuse me for not writing more, but I am tired and can do nothing but talk with Mother Theodore. How much she regrets not having met you! But her heart knows and loves you.

A little later Irma wrote of the departure to one of her sisters:

July, 1840.

They are gone! Last night at nine o'clock dear Mother Theodore and the companions of her exile, all broken-hearted, left this dear home. I was calm until the end; but afterwards my nerves were so unstrung that poor Sister Eudoxie had to take me to her room to spend the night. We remained sitting up in bed until midnight. I had, it seems, an attack of resignation to the holy will of God, and Sister Eudoxie was nearly in the same state as myself. Ah! if you knew how much we love one another here. It was our Sisters who left us; imagine how we wept. You should write a few lines to Mother Theodore; it would do her so much good. I thought that my Sisters in leaving had carried off all my happiness; but this morning, on going into the chapel, I saw that they had left me my most precious treasure—my Savior Jesus and His holy will. His altar is my refuge. I shall weep at His feet. I shall speak to Him of the absent ones and of my dear mission. I shall learn from Him how to practice the virtue of resignation; and thus I shall still be happy. My future is to love and to suffer.

Soon my Sisters will be on the ocean and will have only the God of the heavens and of the sea, while I shall still have Jesus in the Eucharist. How I shall pray for them! But later, when they are in their little chapel in Indiana and I on the waves, ah!—they will return my prayers!

Some days later she wrote again to her sister:

In the midst of my anguish I force my soul to remain calm, and, by the grace of God, I succeed. Affection for creatures, even the most perfect, must not trouble it, because God wishes to see His image always reflected there.

Do you remember, Cecile, our pretty Rance on beautiful summer mornings? How faithfully it reflects the sky and clouds, and how glittering it appears in the golden rays of the rising sun! The large fishing boats glide slowly over its tranquil waters. Often their sails, wet with the beneficent dews of the night, drop their shining tears into the depths of the river, and these delicate pearls increase its volume without diminishing its clearness. Thus may the celestial dew of affliction penetrate the crystal of our souls, and, far from injuring the Divine image whose impression we carefully guard, may it rather impart more consistency and beauty.

To Her Sister Eugenie

Ruillé, August 4, 1840.

All the details you gave me of the Month of Mary greatly interested me. It does me much good to know my children are not abandoned. I often pray for them and for you.

My dear Eugenie, I consider you very fortunate to have the privilege of making the Blessed Virgin loved, and to do this despite your headaches and your repugnances, and the fact that you are not by inclination a pastor. As for myself, I am pleased with being useless here and in knowing it. True, considering the results, I have been so all my life; but I did not know it. There is no bitterness in the words, "I am useless." I am satisfied to be thus, because God wills it; and then if you knew the advantage it is to me! Jesus keeps me for Himself. I make Him continual visits, not very long ones, it is true, for I still have my former infirmity, and it is even worse. Sister Eudoxie had the kindness to mention it first. She said it was not possible for me to remain any length of time in the same place, or even

in the same employment, and she sees to it that I have a variety. So I continue those "eclipses" which afflicted my poor mother so much, and which really are necessary for my life. This malady causes me great humiliation; after a while I shall pass to the butterfly state. But what is to be done? I have, however, just finished an apron for one of the Sisters, the first work of the kind which I have actually accomplished since I came here, and, as it was well and promptly done, I went to show it to everybody. Good little Sister Calixta, a niece of the Sister you saw at home, put on the band; but anyhow I worked very hard at it. I fear this will not reëstablish my reputation, because I am growing as lazy as an old dog that would rather stay in his kennel than go hunting.

All that you told me of our sodality confirms me in my opinion that the Holy Ghost inspired us to choose Abbé Cardonnet as director. Oh! what an election. I shall remember it a long time, as well as the big paper which contained my vote. There will soon be an election here, but I think our Mother will be reëlected. Whatever may happen I am sure never to change superior. I have one for life, whom the good God will not take away. She is yours too. Oh! how good she is, and how happy we are in being able to call her Mother! I entreat you to ask Our Lord the grace to make me love her more and more and to pray often to her. It is a shame to be obliged to ask Him this; but since I am so unfortunate as to require it, I would rather acknowledge it to you. On Saturday I feel nearer to you, because I think you are often with the Blessed Virgin Mary. O my beloved sister, do not regret your inability to shed tears over me. I am so happy! We love each other dearly—of that we have no doubt—so let us think of it no more, but keep our tears for repentance, love and gratitude. Providence has watched over us both; let us, then, love Jesus and Mary with peaceful confidence. If we have to suffer, let it be a joy for us, since we shall have eternity for rest and rejoicing.

I have not yet resignation enough for the sufferings of others. During the three weeks Sister Eudoxie was ill I found myself the Irma of old. Poor Sister suffered a great deal. She told me the same things you did, but I was not any better.

The Sister who visited you has spoken much of you all; but Pepa has captivated her. Cecile was right; this Sister is a Mademoiselle Lepinay. Her niece, who is very gentle, only sixteen years old, was called Eugenie before being Sister Calixta. I love her much; it is impossible not to love a Eugenie under whatever form she may present herself. Adieu; pray for your Irma.

To Her Father

Ruillé, August 10, 1840.

Although your letter is very old, I find it excellent, and I have covered one of my spiritual reading books with it, so that, as it is rather pious, I can read it over and over. Since doing so I find I pray for you oftener, because as I read your desire for detachment from all earthly things, I earnestly ask it for you, my dear father. As this is the second Tuesday of the month, I received Holy Communion for you this morning. I prayed that you might always be submissive to the will of God, for herein is all the happiness of this life which passes away so quickly. As time goes on, I see more clearly that God wishes me to be here, and my sorrow for Vincennes vanishes before the radiant sun of the Divine Will. But I feel better, even physically, since the Sisters left, so I beg you, dear Father, be tranquil and content. My good superior has been sincerely happy in thinking how pleased you are with her decision. She talked to me for a long while about you. It seems there is a kind of contagion which diffuses itself upon those who see you—even a veil does not shelter one from it—and I believe Mother Mary has a little partiality for you; in fact she has acknowledged it almost publicly.

I am happy because I can speak of you to some one who knows you. I can truly say *who knows you,* for she has a penetrating eye and has described you perfectly. You all pleased her very much, and I am such a child that I was delighted to hear it. Ask Aunt de la Salle whether she has not been very deservedly pointed out as the worst of the grown children at Lorette—no reference was made to the second generation, which would be quite another matter. I was much amused to hear Mother pass you all in review. Why was I not there to embrace you after each name and each description? My dear father, I am happy, very happy. Rejoice, then, with me, for the pure joy God gives me. Bless Him for it, and love as ever your *petite fille.*

To Her Sister Cecile

Ruillé, August 15, 1840.

To-day is my feast and, notwithstanding all my memories, I am not only happy but even almost gay. How powerful the Blessed Virgin is! Last evening, however, the sky of my soul was dark, and heavy clouds mounted above the horizon. I should have been glad could I have spoken to our Mother; but I availed myself of an opportunity of going to Sister Eudoxie's room. I remained all the time she was undressing, but instead of telling her what I had in my soul I related nothing but nonsense.

Imagine the Sisters from Brest arriving at night with some postulants, and the good Countess de Maresco at half past nine o'clock going down-stairs in her night-cap! I thought when I saw her in the kitchen among those who had just arrived, that she too was a postulant; for, though she called me by name, I did not recognize her. I was amazed and thought to myself, How will Sister Eudoxie ever begin to form this old candidate? She is more than sixty years old. Well, my dear, it was in talking about this that I spent the little time I could have employed in consulting about my

troubles; as you may suppose, I reproached myself very much when alone in my room.

I felt like crying, but I resisted. I prayed to Saint Anne, whom our chaplain has so often recommended us to invoke, since he went to Auray to celebrate her feast, July 26th. Then I prayed to the Blessed Virgin, and when good Sister Stephen, the infirmarian, came to visit me I was almost asleep. This morning our good God calmed me entirely, and the Blessed Virgin has dissipated all my anxieties. Yesterday I made a crown of immortelles for one of her statues, which is very old and to which I often make little pilgrimages. You see I still preserve my love for antiques.

Last evening our Mother had her cheeks nicely used; it was her feast. I told her of the part of your letter which related to that subject; she did not deny the fact, and when the time for wishing her a happy feast came she said, "Come and kiss me four times," but I followed your counsel of economy and contented myself with two; of course this was remarked. I must tell you that when Father Besnoin had seen her he said to me: "My daughter, I am glad you are here. This is a woman whom you surely will not love too much; she is old and ugly." You can imagine how amused Mother was when I told her this the next day. He could not have said the same of Sister Eudoxie, who must have been charming and who still retains traces of her former beauty. I did not intend to write a letter like this, I had planned one full of devotion. No doubt the good God, seeing how much I need diversion, changed Himself the course of my thoughts.

To Her Mother

Ruillé, September 8, 1840.

If I have reckoned correctly, Sunday will be your feast, my beloved mother, and Saturday will be the time for good wishes. My letter perhaps will be in advance; if so it will be like my heart, which always takes the lead when there is question of wishing you happiness.

I should like so much to be with you Saturday evening to embrace you! I am so well satisfied here, however, that even regrets reverence the walls of the convent and remain at the door without venturing to penetrate into my heart. So instead of saying, Would I were with my brothers and sisters! I shall repeat to you, I am happy, very happy. God gives me the hundredfold in this life. I have made an excellent retreat. I do not know whether others in my place would dare to say, "I have made a retreat," because I walked and talked half the day. But it was not my fault. Father Besnoin gave me for my penance to recreate myself and to be quiet. He has conducted me just as he wished. Indeed if God were to ask me, What have you done with your soul? I could reply to him with assurance, You have not given it to me to keep. . . .

All were very well satisfied with Father Besnoin. His conferences were charming. I made some little extracts which Sister Saint Benedict has copied. She is going to give you a parcel of letters and all sorts of other things, as well as news of me; for she promised that she would go to see you. She is very good, very kind; and she will doubtless tell you that our Mother has been reëlected. The ceremony is very imposing. My heart beat very fast when, after an interval of several hours, the bishop entered the chapel and said, "My daughters, I announce to you that you have a superior." Who was she? It was Mother Mary; for she sat down near the bishop, and we all went and kissed her hand. I assure you I pressed it, and my tears flowed in spite of myself. I pity her much, as well as all who hold office in a community; there are no honors, there is nothing but responsibility. If I dared ask anything from God, I would, with clasped hands entreat Him to place me rather under obedience to the last sister-coadjutrix than to make me her superior; but as I know that cowardice and laziness would prompt my prayer, I shall wait to make it until it proceeds from humility.

I send you for your feast a little pansy from my

garden. I have another present for you also; it is the news that for the last fifteen days my health has been much better. I am beginning to have a good appetite, and am not obliged to eat merely in virtue of holy obedience. I am getting some color, they say—for here you have to rely on the eyes of others to know how you look. I have resumed my studies and am no longer under the law of liberty.

The novitiate has been renewed, with the exception of two or three who came in the course of the year. I am sorry the old ones have gone; I loved them all sincerely. New ones have taken their place; thus the things of this world are always changing. We are twenty at present; twenty-eight have taken the habit this year. During the retreat we were fifty, almost a corps.

There is a young person here from Orleans who reminds me of Olivia. Fancy her coming into a convent with all her little elegant refinements, white hands, manners, tone, fashionable appearance, all; the single difference is that this one desires to become a religious. She says Our Lord was a very distinguished gentleman, who certainly had very good manners, and so on. Imagine how she amuses us! How agreeable they must be to God who, for His sake, despoil themselves courageously, as she does, of all the vestments of worldliness! As mine covered only my soul, they were more difficult to see and take away. Only the hand of God could succeed in doing so. I trust He will always help me, for alone I have no strength.

To Her Sister Pepa

Ruillé, September 26, 1840.

Do not trouble yourselves about sending me anything, my dear ones; I am already too rich; it is my distress. It seems I entered religion to be less poor than in the world. I have nothing old, nothing ugly but myself. I sigh over it before God and with our Mother, who then redoubles her watchfulness to see that I want

nothing. No one understands me here, not even Sister Eudoxie, although she has received a particular gift for the discernment of spirits and the government of hearts. Dear Sister Eudoxie! For three days she has been at Le Mans, and she will remain there a whole week yet. I am very anxious to have her return. She is so good! She interests herself in you all without knowing you, and thinks you in particular would amuse her very much.

My dear Pepa, you must try to keep your good stock of gayety; and since the current of your joy has taken another direction, you must not dry up its source. I understand very well the state you are in, and I thank God for it. It is better to be enlightened by grace now than to wait and see the vanity of life by the pale glimmer of the lamp that will watch at our deathbed. Little by little your heart will acquire stability. You have just passed through a crisis. God has put you in the crucible to consume all the alloy; try now to be faithful to the lights that you receive. I was myself blind and paralytic when I came here; the Lord has opened my eyes, but He has not yet given me the use of my limbs. I see the road, but I cannot walk. I scream with all my might, and God takes me on His shoulder and carries me a little way. When I fancy that I can go by myself, I jump to the ground, but at the first obstacle I fall on my face. I try to get up, and can do nothing but turn over. I begin my cries once more and the Lord hastens to take me in His arms again. How sad it is, my dear, to be so weak and yet so proud!

It was toward the end of July, 1840, that Mother Theodore, accompanied by five other religious, went to Havre to embark for America.

Monsieur Aubineau, in a small volume entitled "Saint Mary-of-the-Woods," and in his book "Some Servants of God," has given minute details of the establishment of the Sisters of Providence in Indiana, details which can scarcely find place in this work proposing,

as it does, to treat only of such particulars of the mission as directly concern Irma. The Sisters, it must be remembered, left in 1840, and the years that have passed since then have effected great changes in the cultivation of America and the means of communication. Forty days were consumed in Mother Theodore's journey to New York, and it was only after a longer time and many hardships that she reached Vincennes, the residence of Monseigneur de la Hailandière; but the Sisters were not to remain at Vincennes as they had expected. The property which the bishop had purchased for them was about sixty-three miles north of Vincennes. At his departure from France he had intended to erect here a commodious dwelling as a convent, but other interests intervened and prevented the execution of his plans. After some days of rest in Vincennes, the Sisters received the blessing of their bishop and started for the place assigned them.

Monsieur Aubineau thus relates their arrival at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, October 22, 1840:

"They started. A priest accompanied them. They moved on and plunged into the wilderness. At last the priest stopped the carriage and announced that they had reached their destination. They alighted, looked around, and found themselves in the midst of a forest. Although they had anticipated poverty, they had not expected this isolation and destitution. They were shown a building in course of construction which was to be their dwelling-place. A little farther on they saw a poor cottage which was occupied by a family. Despite their confidence and their spirit of complete sacrifice, this utter privation aroused in their hearts some little alarm. On asking where they would find the Blessed Sacrament, they were led to a hut about twelve feet long

and ten feet wide, and constructed of the trunks of trees laid horizontally one upon the other. The door, without hinges, was difficult to open and as difficult to close. At one side there was a wide fireplace through which the light came down, and in one corner, spread on some boards, was a miserable pallet, the bed of the priest in charge of this strange church. At the other end was a little window stuffed with rags and brushwood to keep out the cold, which was already beginning to be sharp. Finally, some faded and torn calico arranged in the way of a curtain surrounded and sheltered a board placed against the wall and supported by two stakes driven into the ground. They drew aside this curtain, and there amid that poverty they recognized the King of Heaven and earth in all His sweetness and benignity. He reposed there in a little pyx, with no tabernacle, no light—none of the things which usually surround His Majesty. When they saw and adored their Divine Master in this extreme indigence, a lively image of the Stable of Bethlehem, they considered themselves too well treated and blushed at their momentary weakness. They found accommodations with the family in the cottage, who gave up to them a small apartment to be the living-room of the community, and a garret which was to be their dormitory. The evening of their arrival four postulants joined them. God blessed their work; and as the house of the Lord is not made of stones shaped by the hands of man, but rather of living stones, that is, hearts quarried and fashioned by grace, the Sisters had already founded the convent of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

"The little garret which served them as a dormitory was so small and so crowded with beds that, in order to reach the last, they had to walk over all the others. Yet although it was so perfectly close, they never succeeded

in sheltering their beds from the rain and snow which came in through the openings in the roof. Thus they passed the long and severe winter of 1840–1841. It was only at the end of that year that the Sisters could move into their own house and open a boarding-school."

Such was the poverty of the foundresses of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Their Right Reverend Father was not much better provided with this world's goods. Concerning the Cathedral of Vincennes and the bishop's dwelling, Mother Theodore wrote:

We went to the cathedral. Our barn at Soulaines is better kept and more comfortable. On beholding such poverty I wept so bitterly that it was impossible for me to examine the church that day. The next day I looked at it more calmly. It is a brick building with large, uncurtained windows, the panes of which are nearly all broken. At the gable end there is a sort of unfinished steeple, resembling a large chimney in ruins. The interior corresponds perfectly to the exterior:—a poor wooden altar; a Communion railing unfinished, but which seems to be falling from decay; the episcopal seat, an old red armchair which a peasant would not wish in his house: in fact, I never saw anything so poor as this church at Vincennes. . . .

I believe I did not tell you about the bishop's residence. He himself fell from the steps into the snow when he started to make his first episcopal visit. Although there was no snow when we called, we might have fallen, too, for the six steps are made of worm-eaten planks which shake under one's feet. . . .

The house of Monseigneur de la Hailandière is like a store, where the priests go to get whatever is indispensable. All that he has is theirs, but the father and children often want what is most necessary. This is why the church and house are in such a bad condition, for before all things life must be sustained. . . .

May your part in this indigence be to us, servants of

Jesus and daughters of Providence, precious even in the most insignificant details! Let us prefer what we should accept to what we might have chosen. In our poverty let us say with Saint Ignatius, "Though many things are wanting to us, may God not be wanting!"

CHAPTER XI

IRMA RECEIVES THE RELIGIOUS HABIT—HER WORK AT BREST

TOWARD the close of the year 1840, Mother Mary granted Irma permission to receive the religious Habit. The favored novice imparts the joyful tidings in a letter:

To Her Mother

Ruillé, December 8, 1840.

I did not expect the beautiful New Year's gift God is going to give me. I thought the year would close and another open without bringing me any exterior change; but the Lord was mindful of me. He wishes to clothe me in His livery and employ me, according to my feeble strength, in His service. My dear mother, could you but know how happy I am! I was afraid I might die before becoming a religious. I found I was advancing so slowly in the path I pursued that I feared I should never see the end; and, besides, I felt myself so incapable of an employment or of any fatiguing occupation. But the Providence of God is the "Refuge of the miserable." Under this title I invoke Him every day in the litany composed in His honor; and this sweet Providence, that has led me by such admirable ways, deigns to come to the aid of my weakness and to keep me in Its care.

I have just heard of Abbé Coëdro's death. May God's holy will be done! We almost regret the happiness he will enjoy. It would seem men like him should not die; but God judges otherwise.

Bless your Irma, dearest mamma, and pardon all the trouble she has given you.

On the same day she writes:

To Her Father

How I bless the moment, my beloved father, when, notwithstanding all the anguish of your heart, you courageously gave me to Our Lord! It had to be so; what seemed folly in the eyes of human prudence was the only means of bringing me here. Do not weep. God has counted all your tears, my beloved father, and will transform them into pearls which shall beautify your crown throughout eternity. What I regret and what I weep over is that I have profited so little by your example, that I so often grieved you in my childhood, and still more so in my youth. Forgive me, I beg you, and bless me once more. Our good God has forgiven me, and you, too, have done so, I know. How I shall pray for you!

I should like to write to my dear grandmother; but I beg you to say to her, as well as to my good godmother, my uncle, and my aunts, that I am very sorry for all the pain I have ever caused them. I beg them all to rejoice with me, and I ask a Communion when it will be convenient for them. We shall receive the Holy Habit next Sunday, the 13th. When you write to my brothers give them a thousand loving messages for me. Be assured, dear father, of the gratitude and love of your Irma.

To Her Sister Eugenie

(Same date)

The day has come at last, the day I deserve so little to see, the day of my reception of the Holy Habit! If you only knew how happy I am, you, too, would be happy, for you are my second mother and will joyously offer me to Jesus by the hands of Mary. This morning I thought of you and of our Sodality.

I ask a Communion from you and from my other sisters to thank God for the great favor He bestows upon me. You must put a beautiful bouquet before the shrines of our Blessed Mother and of our Guardian Angel. Please say a little prayer to them every day for your fortunate daughter. As you have some claims at the Providence of Nazareth, you might ask the mistresses and the little orphans to say their beads for me. Imagine you see me with a big rosary at my side.— O my God, teach me to say it!— There was never so ignorant a religious before; still I am very happy. Please ask mamma to make a feast for my dear poor the day I take the Habit. Do not insist, however, and tell her I desire only what she finds convenient to do. Recommend me also to the prayers of my good people. Dearest Eugenie! I shall soon have to leave Providence Home. Think what strength I shall need. O my dear and much-loved sisters, let us rejoice together. Tell my cousins and friends, so that they may pray for me.

She finishes her letter with some lines to her sister Cecile:

If you could see my joy, Cecile, you would have, if not a vocation, at least the desire of being a religious. What you tell me has little of your old fancies for a vocation, but every one is not called to the same state; and, as Father Besnoin says, (quoting Saint Paul), there is the "great Sacrament." . . . Abandon your heart to Jesus; behold Him who comes to seek it. Can you refuse it to Him when you see Him, trembling with cold for you, lying on a bed of straw in a wretched stable? I say to you with good Saint Francis, "Take one of His dear tears, and put it in your heart, for it will heal every wound."

I shall receive the Holy Habit on the 13th of this month. There are but three of us for vesture. Everything is simple here; we have no elaborate dressing, as in cloistered Orders.

Cecile, it is not to a man that I am giving myself, but to a God. Get all the prayers you can for me, and you yourself make some sacrifices for me. I will repay you later on. If you love me, this is the time to prove it to your Irma.

To Her Mother

Ruillé, December 20, 1840.

My beloved mother, perhaps the time which has passed since my receiving the Holy Habit has seemed long to you, but I am like water frozen into ice, and I have been waiting for a thaw, that I might tell you of the new course I have entered upon. Knowing your desire to hear something of the most beautiful day of my life, I shall begin this letter, though I do not know where it will end.

It is easy to describe my toilet. I was dressed in white and wore a white bonnet and a net veil, but, as it was cold, I had a shawl instead of the mantle that is worn in summer. My companions, Sister Anacletus and Sister Vitalis, were dressed the same way. We carried tapers. The ceremony took place about nine o'clock in the morning. After the first Gospel of the Mass, our chaplain gave us a pretty little sermon. He compared us to the three children released from the fiery furnace, and said that, like them, we ought to invite the cold and the ice to praise the Lord, and that, in spite of the hardness of the season, the 13th of December should always be a feast-day for us. He then gave us the Holy Habit, after having blessed it. I kissed mine with all the tenderness of a mother for her child, then I went to the hall where I was dressed. I must have been anything but sightly, for I cried during the whole time. While we were dressing, they sang in the chapel the Litany of the Saints and *In exitu Israel.* When we returned they gave us our veils, which Mother placed on our heads; then, our large beads and crucifixes.

It is easy to describe the exterior ceremonies, but to tell you what passed in my soul would be utterly impos-

sible. God alone, who sent torrents of joy into it, can know the sentiments of gratitude and tenderness that I felt. How I thank you, my dear mother, for having given me to Our Lord. Father tells me in his excellent letter to prepare for combats, and he is right; for the life that I have embraced is a life of sacrifice and death. But God gives a little foretaste of heaven to His soldiers to put them in good heart on the day they are clothed in His uniform.

The rest of the day passed off very well. I was obliged to have a second cap, as my new costume is not suited to caresses and felicitations. In honor of our betrothal my companions and I dined at the superiors' table, and permission to talk was given. We had a dinner appropriate for the feast. I have a great deal of trouble in putting my cap on straight. Sister Eudoxie is giving me lessons. I have had a severe cold during the past three weeks, but it is better since I received the Habit. In the evening of the day I first wore my dear costume I felt a strong dislike to take it off. I placed my large beads around my neck. Blessed chain! Lead me to Jesus through Mary!

After receiving the religious Habit, the novices left Ruillé to begin their labors under obedience in the different missions in charge of the Sisters of Providence. Irma, like her companions, left the novitiate not without regret; for her loving heart was attached to it, all the more strongly as God was the bond that united her to her superiors and Sisters. To soften the separation, Mother Mary chose Brest as Irma's place of residence. Two of her brothers, for whom she had a special affection, were there, Charles, a lieutenant, and Henri, a commissary in the navy. At Brest also lived Madame Thyrat and Madame Gicquel des Touches—born Le Fer de la Saudre—both relatives and intimate friends of her mother and of her aunts. On her way Irma passed

through Rennes, where Mother Mary allowed her to spend a few days in order to see some other members of her family. To make known this new joy Irma wrote at once to her parents:

Next Friday, January 8, I shall be at Rennes with the Sisters of Providence in the Rue Haute waiting to meet those of you who will come to embrace me. I leave the choice to the holy will of God; yet I venture to remind my father that it is only fifteen leagues from Saint Servan to Rennes. If he is afraid of the cold he can wear his famous yellow wolf,[1] or he may even put on his three winter overcoats. I know how delicate his health is, and how precious it is to us all. I leave my wishes, therefore, in the hands of my Heavenly Father first; for my other father might try to satisfy them despite the rules of prudence.

Do not be sad on account of my departure from Ruillé, for in putting me under Sister Saint Ange, superior of Brest, God treats me like a spoiled child. They say it is a very fine establishment, with twelve Sisters and a chapel where Jesus dwells in the Blessed Sacrament. With Jesus, what else can we desire?

Monsieur le Fer, who always forgot himself for others, left to his wife and daughters the pleasure of going to Rennes. They could be entertained at the convent and could thus profit more fully by the short time Irma was able to grant them. Madame le Fer and her two daughters, Eugenie and Cecile, expected to meet Irma at Rennes when they arrived there. Great, indeed, was their disappointment and uneasiness on learning that she was detained by the snow and ice. Their painful suspense was prolonged nearly a week, during which time they received neither news nor letters. Their anxiety, however, was at length turned to joy

[1] A fur coat.

when the dear traveler was in their arms. Although the horse had proceeded at a slow pace, Irma had been exposed to many dangers in the little carriage from Ruillé, but Providence protected her always and everywhere. Referring afterwards to this happy reunion, Madame le Fer said: "Sometimes the happiness of heaven is compared to that of the mother on recovering the child she had thought to be lost. I do not think a greater joy can be felt on earth. I felt this happiness in all its purity, for it came from God. I had offered my daughter to Him in sacrifice, and He had given her back to me."

Concerning this same event, Madame le Fer wrote to Mother Theodore, who she knew was anxiously awaiting news from Irma at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods:

The good God has been very good to me. He reunited me to my Irma for a few days. Of our visit I shall give some details to you—you to whom I have so often spoken of my troubles. The day after the reception of her letter, Eugenie, Cecile, and I went to Rennes where she was to arrive the next day. We proceeded at once to the convent of the Sisters of Providence, but to our great regret the dear child was not there, and we found a short letter in which she said that she was obliged to postpone her journey on account of the snow, which had fallen in abundance. My dear Sister, we remained there five days without receiving any news of the dear child. Finally, on Thursday at noon I clasped her in my arms. Oh! you have learned from my letters all my natural anguish, than which death would perhaps have been less cruel; paint now, if you can, my joy! I needed to throw myself a few moments afterwards at the feet of Jesus, who in His extreme goodness wished to give back to me, as to Abraham, the child I had offered in sacrifice. There abundant tears relieved my heart. I poured it out into the Heart of Him who in

return solaces with such tenderness the souls He pleases to console. For several hours I could not look at my dear daughter without emotion. I could hardly believe this was the child I had thought to have lost irreparably (for I do not know whether, had she gone to America, I would have wished to see her again). O my dear Sister Theodore, if you love me truly, me and mine, you will rejoice in our happiness; and, in rejoicing, you will be satisfied not to have Irma with you, and especially you will do nothing to keep up her desire to rejoin you. I feel, now that I have seen her and have had the happiness of spending more than three days with her, how painful a new sacrifice would be; and I hope that God who gave her back to me, without our having done anything to keep her, will leave her with me in France, in Brest, where He seems to have sent her to be the Angel Guardian of her brothers. Besides, her good father's health continues so poor that I hope his heart will not be subjected to so hard a trial. I do not know whether he could endure it.

Irma saw two of her brothers also at Rennes, Alphonse, who was at the seminary, and Eugene, her former pupil, who was continuing his studies at the college. After several happy days spent at the convent of the Sisters of Providence, Madame le Fer and her two daughters returned to Saint Servan. On the day of their departure Irma took the stage for Brest, traveling alone for the first time. After reaching that city she recounted the incidents of the journey in the letters that follow.

To Her Mother

Brest, January, 1841. Friday.

Here I am at Brest, my dear mother, where I arrived Tuesday evening safe and sound. I really believe that the angels watch over the Sisters of Providence, or I should have broken my limbs two or three times at

least. Our stage was on the point of upsetting at Montauban. It was at a turn in the street and I could see what was going to happen. Suddenly the horses slipped, the driver was thrown from his seat to the ground, and the glass was shivered by the shock. I should certainly had been crushed in the corner I occupied, had not God kept back the heavy mass, and people arrived in time to prevent its fall. We were delayed there an hour while the axle was being repaired.

In the coach was a young man who treated his wife as if she were a religious. In the middle of the night he told her for the first time that he had enlisted for three years in the army. Poor woman! thinking she was making a pleasure trip, and then finding she was being taken two hundred leagues from her own town, and from her mother, to live in a garrison at Paimpol! While listening to her lamentations, and seeing her so resigned despite her sorrow, I could not help thanking God for the part He had conferred on me. Still, I cannot complain of my companions, for the young man was even careful enough to give me warning not to be alarmed when he struck a match to light his pipe. The only troublesome time I had was the moment of my departure. I supposed that you had engaged a place for me in the coach, and I was telling my companions I had the first seat. A tall English captain added very politely, "My lady, if the place is mine I shall give it to you." Quickly I took a seat in the front of the coach. Two minutes later I saw my tall Englishman and the conductor coming to dislodge some one. When the latter saw me, he said: "Madam, your place is on the inside; come down." As I had seen officers and men of all sorts enter the inside, my heart throbbed and tears came to my eyes as I explained that I had made a mistake. *"Mon dame, vous pas pleurer,"* said the charitable Englishman in broken French; and once more he gave me his place and went to where I should have been obliged to go.

I was well during the thirty-six hours of my journey,

and reached Brest Tuesday evening during the time of the profound silence.[1] I can use convent expressions with you now.[2] Good Sister Saint Ange and all the rest received me very kindly. My head was a little dizzy when I arrived. The next day I saw the excellent Madame Thyrat and Therese. They were charming. They read me a letter from Charles, who is pleased with Cadiz and does not speak of returning; but they expect Henri soon.

Nobody here knew I was coming as Mother Mary had forgotten to announce me to Sister Saint Ange. Though I was unexpected, the reception they gave me was none the less cordial.

Brest, March, 1841.

I see, my dear mother, that one of my letters has been lost. I regret it, for it would have given all the details you desire. Do not feel bad on account of the fewness and brevity of my letters. You have given me entirely to God, forever, even until death. This good God gave me to you for three days, and He promises you the same joy again after a little while.[3] We must not be miserly towards Him nor take back the gifts we have once offered Him, particularly when they are so trifling. Life here passes with frightful rapidity. We roll on toward heaven as if propelled by steam. Prayers, Mass, meditation, class, study, repasts, succeed each other so closely as not to leave any free time. Madame Gicquel is like yourself; she does not understand this, and therefore claims visits. Madame Thyrat pleases me better; she sees the reason for it and helps me to convince our dear relative.

I passed the carnival very differently from what you imagine. I played several hours at *biribi,* at *piau,* and especially at the incomparable *moufti,* which met with

1 The so-called "great" silence observed from the end of evening recreation until after the morning meditation.

2 Having spent twelve days with the Sisters at Rennes, Madame le Fer was accustomed to say she had made a little novitiate there.

3 Madame le Fer intended to go soon to Brest.

the same success here as at Ruillé. I was surrounded by about a hundred children, with whom I have ever since been on the best of terms.

Could you send me a Hosselin's Grammar, dear mamma? I ask it for my two colleagues as well as for myself, charity for the three of us. How I love my vocation, wherein we enjoy all things in common! I very much fear, however, that, in regard to poverty, nature is detrimental to virtue in me; for you know my inclinations in this respect, and they have only grown stronger. Yesterday, however, when I saw a poor Spanish religious who was begging the means to go to America, I wished to be rich; he wept so bitterly that I wept with him. I still have tears, still a heart, and in this heart there is still a large place for my beloved mother.

To Her Sister Eugenie

Brest, April 15, 1841.

To-day is Thursday, and while Sister Mary Philomene is conducting three-fourths of the children to catechism, Sister Marie has the kindness to keep the rest together with her own pupils. They wish to have a holiday; but they have already had eight days' vacation on account of Easter, and we cannot favor the pleadings of their laziness. Nevertheless, to conciliate all, a little girl of my class, Hortense T——, has been permitted to tell stories while the others work. She has just told them a story of the "White Cat," and in so charming a manner that, although I am twenty-five years old today, I foolishly remained listening to her. The children of Brest are generally intelligent and of a loving disposition, but their frivolity and love of pleasure are without parallel.

For some days my ordinary life has been interrupted by the return of my usual spring cold and earache. Though the latter has been removed by the application of mustard to my feet, there is still in my left ear a noise like the roaring of the sea. My health now is restored to its normal state. I spent Holy Week with-

out going to church; but having risen on Easter Sunday, I went to St. Louis's in the morning for Mass. We have no Mass in our chapel on Sunday, and this is a little inconvenient. The Lenten preacher treated of very lofty subjects, such as "The Divinity of Christ," "The Catholic Church," "The Authority of the Pope," etc. His discourses were always very deep, his gestures and voice magnificent. But he did not please the common people. There was something, I do not know what, hard and severe about him. At times I seemed to hear Bossuet preaching his thoughts in the language of the nineteenth century. The speaker openly attacked the Fourierists, a sect which prevails in Brest and which is impregnated with the principles of Fourier. Abbé Cuzon, chaplain of the college, a very learned priest and somewhat like Abbé Cardonnet, has told us of these people. Let us pray, dear sister, that the Catholic faith may not be impaired in France. When we cast a glance over the world, we realize how small is the number of the elect.

To Her Sister Cecile

Brest, May, 1841.

Your letter, my dear little sister, shows your heart, always agitated and undecided. What prevents your saying to God, "I am yours; save your child"? Oh! if you knew the Heart of Jesus, you would leave to Him the future which seems so frightful to you, and which in reality has its dangers. You know well there is no happiness but in perfect abandonment of oneself into the hands of God. It is a martyrdom to have a wavering and divided heart. "The bed of your soul is too narrow," says the prophet, "for both God and creatures; one or the other must fall out." Would you wish it to be God? Let us turn to profit our natural disposition, our regrettable yet fortunate sensitiveness, which is like a piercing sword when directed towards creatures, but when turned to God is like a spring of living water gushing up toward heaven.

Open your heart to our sister Eugenie; occupy yourself with the poor; try to pay for a retreat for those whom it might benefit. Be on your guard against that romantic melancholy to which we are both inclined. God, it is true, has greatly changed me, and, to give you a proof, I can tell you I feel no emotion whatever on beholding the sea again.

Yesterday I received a letter from Ruillé which gave me the sad news that Mother Theodore is past recovery. On the 3d of February, when the Sisters wrote to Ruillé, she had already been dangerously ill for forty days. My beloved Mother Theodore! I grieve over her as dead. She is nearly that to me, whether above or beneath the ground at Vincennes. I am glad that neither you nor my parents knew her, for you would feel too much regret now. She is very happy to have consummated her sacrifice, and I am very happy to have desired to accomplish mine.

Sister Saint Francis Xavier's godchild, her youngest sister, Clementine, was accustomed to open her heart to her in correspondence, as she had formerly done in conversation. Irma continued to instruct her and to respond to her confidence with all her former kindness.

May, 1841.

Dear little daughter [she says]: So you are afraid of living to be very, very old, and of loving too long that dear Savior who has loved you for more than a million of years! Be assured you have not too many moments to give Him. You will die soon, be sure of it, for life is very short. The younger you enter the service of the Lord the easier virtue will become to you. You object, "If I reform they will think I am a saint. Abbé le Pailleur will think I am very proud if I have nothing to confess." But, my dear child, you do not confess your sins to Abbé le Pailleur; it is to our good Savior Jesus. Abbé le Pailleur is there like the curtain of the confessional; it makes little difference what

he thinks. Besides, if you examine well, you will find that you have much vanity, indolence, self-love; little consideration for others; some disobedience and greediness; distractions in your prayers, idle curiosity, little lies, etc. Oh! you are by no means a saint. It might be thought, perhaps, that since you are of the Le Fer family you are better than others; but the good God knows that you are far from having corresponded with all the graces He has given you; for, my child, you have received very special favors, and you will have to submit to a very severe judgment.

If I mistake not, my dear godchild, you must have made your second Communion yesterday; ordinarily the children's retreat at Saint Servan begins fifteen days after Easter. I have been with you in spirit and have prayed much for you. All the good news of your last letter gave me great pleasure, and my vanity as teacher was suddenly aroused; but I was still more pleased to see that you wish to imitate Marie R——, for I desire you to be happy, and you will be so if you are good. Thus, when you say, "The good God loves me; He is pleased with what I have just done; to please Him I have made this little sacrifice," do you not then feel joy in the depths of your soul? My dear child! how happy I should be to visit you some evening at your bedside as I used to do. Then, after I had kissed your nice rosy cheeks, we would talk once more of the joys of paradise and of your First Communion. Do you remember that when I told you in heaven we possess all we desire, how you made heaven according to your age and fancy? You wished for lambs trimmed with pink ribbons, for little girls dressed in gold and silver robes, for heaps of toasted almonds and sugar-plums; and after this list my little godchild smiled at me and said, "Can it be possible, Irma, that all these things will belong to me?" "Yes, my child, if you desire them in paradise; for Saint Paul says all our wishes shall be gratified." But when reason came to you, the reality of divine beauties appeared to you. Another series

of delights offered itself. You now see a Divine Lamb immolated to procure eternal glory for you; bands of virgins with crowns more brilliant than precious stones, lilies of dazzling whiteness in their hands, and robes of the hues of purple or of snow. You think of the Sacred Bread with which the angels are nourished and you say, "Can it be possible, Irma, that I shall one day share this happiness?" I am not there to answer you, but at the hour when you retire I say to Jesus and Mary, Visit my little Clementine for me; she is our child, she belongs to us three, and you love her even more than I do. . . . But, dear and too-much-loved child, I believe God alone can surpass me in affection for you.

To Her Sister Elvire

Brest, June, 1841.

It seems a long time since I saw you. Sometimes I find myself with you and Clementine in the little arbor of the garden where we sowed seeds. Have they produced any fruit, or at least a few blossoms? Courage, dear; life is shorter than you think. Elvire, I entreat you not to neglect your meditations. On this subject I must tell you a dream I had the other night. There was no land nor sea; it was the last day of the world; the general judgment was to take place in a quarter of an hour. We were in a great fright, as you can well imagine. I threw myself at the feet of the Eternal Father and begged him to grant me a few minutes of conversation with His Son. I wanted to plead for my brothers, for you, for all our family. I was afraid we should have an unfavorable judgment, and I knew that when our Lord would have pronounced sentence there would be no chance of arguing on our side. But, my dear Elvire, this short quarter of an hour that I so earnestly desired was unmercifully refused. There were other things to attend to besides listening to me. The next morning I was still deaf from the noise made by the whole world in the valley of Josaphat!

Ah! the quarter of an hour then so much desired is given to us every day in meditation. Let us now say to Jesus all we have to tell Him, for on the day of judgment He will not have time to listen to us. Attach yourself to Him. Is it because while on our altars He is destitute of glory and power that we have no fear of displeasing Him? He is merciful now, but He will be terrible in His anger. Give yourself, then, generously to Him. I recommend Clementine to you. Oh! sometimes speak together of that little arbor in the garden, and recall the promises [1] you made there. Give my love to your friends Delamarre, Magon, and Ryan.

Writing again to the same sister, she says:

You ask, "Why learn? For whom study?" You think I am going to say, For yourself, my dear Elvire. But, no. Why should I learn? For whom? For a long time I knew not for whom, and often I said to God, "Of what use will all this be to me?" O my dear Elvire! we must study for God. Should He not call you to the religious life, you will be an honor to religion in the world. And how do you know that you will have no children, nephews, or nieces to instruct? Would you be useless to society? Oh, no; a life wrapped up in one's self would be too petty and contemptible. Study, then, my dear child, study for God. He is well worth the trouble.

I trust all your wrong ideas are gone, and that you are grateful for being chosen a member of the Blessed Virgin Sodality. Think how I used to be: when I was sent to confession in spite of myself, or when I was obliged to make retreats, I uttered cries like a dog dragged to the sea to be drowned. You have not an aversion to being a sodalist; you are merely indifferent. Now, if you prepare yourself well, you will be more pleasing to the Blessed Virgin than if you had felt naturally inclined to become one. I hope by the time you receive this you will have performed that great

[1] To observe a little rule of life which Irma had composed for them.

action. Sunday afternoon I shall pray for you. While reading your letter, poor little Elvire, I thought it was myself on one of those wretched days when we would willingly throw our soul out of the window, so little do we care for it. But if you care so little for your own, I beg and entreat you to have pity on those of others by being sure to lend them the books I left in your care. I feel certain I owe my beautiful vocation to the interest I took in the souls that I came across on the journey of life. Do the same and have confidence.

To Her Mother

Brest, June 5, 1841.

So you repent of your generous proposition, my dearest mother. I must acknowledge that I myself have found the time very long since I last wrote to you. In the future I shall do as you wish in regard to our correspondence. Your letters always afford me great pleasure, and I unite with you in blessing the Providence of God which watches so tenderly over our family. Certainly it will never abandon us if we are grateful. Poor Charles! how frightened I have been at the thought of the dangers to which he was exposed. Let us pray much for him, for dangers are to be feared even in the harbor. Henri does not return; God knows what is best for him.

Of all virtues I believe what pleases God the most and is most proper for us is a perfect abandonment of ourselves into His hands. When I consider my life, especially the last two years of it, I see on the part of God so many proofs of love, so touching a care for me, that to distrust Him would be the greatest ingratitude. Since I left our dear Providence Convent where I was so sincerely loved, since I embraced a uniform life at Brest, a regulated life so little in accordance with my vagabond tastes, God has redoubled His kindness to me, my dear mother. I tell you this so that you may thank Him once more.

In answer to your question as to our method of teach-

ing, I must say that I find it generally good, even excellent for orthography, writing, and mathematics. It fatigues neither the pupils nor the teachers; no exercise lasts longer than half an hour, except needlework, which is in great favor here, and for which you know my incapacity. All sorts of things are sold; we have a real store, and, without exaggeration, the same objects may be found here as at Monsieur Duval's.[1] Imagine how busy we are. You asked, too, whether I am pleased with my confessor. I answer, Yes. Were I to change confessors a hundred times I should always be satisfied, provided they gave me absolution for my sins and did not keep me too long. This the curé of Brest does for me, and it is all I need. Besides, we are very happy in not having the trouble of choosing our confessors, as God chooses for us.

First Communion and Confirmation gave us a great deal of work. There were more than two hundred children from our classes attending the retreat. The ceremony was beautiful. The bishop confirmed 1218 persons. I had never before seen so many children in white nor so many lighted tapers; the communicants and those to be confirmed carried candles, and at each important exercise of the last two days the candles were all lighted; the effect was very beautiful. Bishop Legraverend was received in the city of Brest with much joy; but the bishop's qualities make the people regret having lost him as curé. August Gicquel made his First Communion. Therese brought him to see me; she seemed very happy with all her lovely children. This morning, June 5, I have been thinking much of Alphonse. Had Monseigneur Saint Marc been consecrated, our dear brother would have had at last the happiness of taking that grand step,[2] so holy, so glorious, so long desired. Dear Alphonse! What a grace God has granted him. The charming Madame Thyrat [3] often comes to see me. Zoe comes also. They say she

[1] A bookseller of Saint Servan.
[2] She speaks of his ordination.
[3] Madame Albert Gicquel des Touches.

is gifted with serious and beautiful qualities, but our intimacy has not increased much. I desire no friends outside of my community. I have twelve Sisters, and in them I find goodness, sympathy, the kindest attention, and, above all, cordial charity.

Having received no news of Mother Theodore's death, I have some rays of hope. This dearly beloved Mother would certainly be happier in heaven; but if she remains here below her robe will be more richly embroidered, her crown adorned with more beautiful jewels, for she aspires only to make Jesus known and loved.

To Her Sister Cecile

Brest, 1841.

Dead though I am supposed to be, here I come again to encourage you to persevere in your resolutions. I have asked Sister Dosithie's permission to do it, for she is very much interested in your soul; and who would not love a soul for which God has done so much?

First of all, entire obedience to mamma in everything relating to dress. This will be very pleasing to God. Tell Him that you wish to be beautiful only in His eyes; that you would be ashamed to be elegantly dressed since Mary, our model, so loved simplicity; that you do not wish fine shoes when, out of love for you, your Savior had great nails driven into His feet; that you desire to be economical and orderly. To speak of order ill becomes me who have so little of it; but I wish to correct myself. To sweep a room, or to pick up crumbs of bread, even to mend old stockings, is more pleasing to God, if done for love of Him, than to go to Vincennes with a less degree of love. Our perfection consists in doing well whatever we do, if it be only to shell peas or beans, or feed the little ducks. Let there be no hurry to go from one thing to another. You have really nothing to do at home but what God wishes, and He communicates His orders to you through mamma. In this is true perfection; it is said in one line, but it is

not learned in one day. Through meditation and prayer you will understand it.

I wish to say something also in regard to those romances which are read and sung. If they are now what they were in my time, they are very insipid, very passionate. They associate angels with cupids, the Blessed Virgin's name with profane love—Mary who is so pure! Oh! it seems to me she is there like the statue of Fénelon near that of Voltaire in the Panthéon—she must feel very much out of place. I beg you to sacrifice to Jesus and Mary those songs half sacred, half profane, and whose melancholy airs would have a dangerous charm for you. O Cecile! you wish to hear the ravishing concerts of angels, would you not have the courage to renounce those strains as transient as the rustling of a bird's wing? But, fearing you may be alarmed, I propose a rule of conduct. When a song is given to you, take it to mamma without showing any desire for her approval of it, and silently await her decision. You should not say to yourself, So-and-so sings it, for that would be the same as saying, So-and-so poisons herself a little every day; I may do the same.

No doubt you think me severe; but you see since I have breathed a purer air, since I have left the world, I have found so much peace that I desire to make known to you the means of tasting its fruits. It is necessary, my dear child, to abstain from reading works that are too tender or too exalted, even on religious subjects. You wish to read a little of everything for several reasons: first, for pleasure, when the books are entertaining; secondly, for curiosity, when they are new; thirdly, (and I am sure you will laugh when I say it) you read because others do so. A book is lent you and you are afraid to refuse it; you fear to disoblige; and besides, you wish to pass your small judgment on the work. O human weakness! This is how I once was and how I still should be, if God had not enlightened me.

In your spiritual reading you read and read, thinking to find on the fourth page what is necessary, al-

though you had already found it on the first; but, instead of reflecting you continue to read on, especially if the book is well written. Read little, my dear Cecile, and read slowly. I advise you to become acquainted with Bourdaloue, Saint Francis de Sales, or some good old writers; but moderately, except when there is a question of increasing your knowledge of religion, for we can never know too much to teach catechism.

As to your confessions, have a true desire to correct yourself, a great faith in the accusation. It is not necessary to be particular over a multitude of little consultations that we often make more to satisfy ourselves than to seek God. Say but little; simply tell what is necessary, and never hold useless conversations. Say only what you would say to our Lord if you were making your confession to Him five minutes before your death.

As for your Communions, never miss one through your own fault; abandon yourself completely to the holy will of God; have great respect for the presence of Our Lord Jesus, and keep yourself humble before Him. We never sin by too great respect, provided we have confidence.

In regard to your meditations, remember to prepare them to some extent the evening before. Never make them vaguely, and always take a resolution which relates to your particular examen. Never begin your meditation without having first asked God Himself to teach you how to reflect and pray. Always take Him for your teacher. O my dear child, He alone is truly capable and good.

From Irma's letters dated at Brest it is evident that the good superior, Sister Saint Ange, welcomed her with great kindness, and that her companions manifested an affectionate and tender interest in her. The pupils entrusted to her were not in any way a source of anxiety, yet the six months she spent in Brest was one of the most painful epochs of her life.

Her two brothers, Charles and Henri, prolonged their travels at sea. To God only could she speak of their souls. Her first superiors, who had guided her with a particular care, were far from her; the zeal which consumed her was limited to her department of daily teaching; lastly, it was at Brest that she learned that Mother Theodore's health was suffering from the terrible winter in Indiana, and that a severe illness had reduced her to the last extremity.

At that period it required a very long time for a letter to reach Europe, and Irma remained for more than a month without knowing whether the one she loved so much was living or dead. The news of this dear superior's recovery came at last as a great relief. The thought of all that Mother Theodore could do for the glory of God and the salvation of souls gave Irma particular joy, since she could no longer cherish any hope of joining her. Mother Mary in sending Irma to Brest seemed to have settled the question of America finally and negatively. Still, Irma felt reviving in her heart those ardent desires which impelled her toward the foreign missions, and the incessant conflict between her aspirations and her religious submission caused her inexpressible suffering and exhausted her strength.

In the meantime Bishop de la Hailandière, who had sent Irma to Mother Mary only to be prepared for America, was asking for her in the interests of his mission. Mother Theodore had been allowed to hope that she would join her the next year, and she now asked as a favor to have Irma sent to Vincennes. Abbé Cardonnet supported the entreaties of both with the Superior General, who informed Monsieur and Madame le Fer of the earnest demands of Bishop de la Hailandière. While not altogether yielding, Mother Mary wrote to

Irma that she left her free to decide for herself between France and America.

It was not to keep her liberty, however, that Irma had embraced a religious life, but to make an entire sacrifice of it to God. Being thus suddenly deprived of the wise direction of the Mother General, she addressed herself to the ecclesiastical superior of her community, Monseigneur Bouvier, Bishop of Le Mans, who responded to her letter as follows:

Knowing you by reputation only, my dear daughter, what counsel can I give you? Considering merely your personal sanctification, I should think it better and safer for you to remain where you are. The Bishop of Vincennes and Mother Theodore eagerly ask for you. Abbé Cardonnet thinks it unfair to prevent you from going, and he seems to disapprove of the Superior General of the Sisters of Ruillé. The good superior, worried by so many remarks and accusations, leaves it to your choice. I understand your embarrassment, and I feel the same myself, as I have not the necessary information on the matter to pass an enlightened judgment. There is no time for me to confer with the Mother Superior of Ruillé and her Sister Assistants, but I am inclined to tell you to go. At the same time, purify your intentions well, strengthen yourself in your resolutions, seek God only, and ask Him unceasingly for grace to grow more and more in His love. This is all I can say to you. I have nothing more at heart than to see you a saint, and to help Bishop de la Hailandière in all he desires to do. Receive, my dear daughter, the assurance of my paternal affection.

Bishop Bouvier was inclined to tell her to go, but that was no decision. Irma felt so strongly drawn towards America that the very ardor of her desire withheld her. She feared to follow her own inclination, and thus fail to seek merely the holy will of God, which alone she de-

sired to fulfill. After a night spent in supplication and prayer, and the anguish of indecision, she felt she could no longer endure the uncertainty, and asked permission of Sister Saint Ange to go to Le Mans, in order to place her destiny in the hands of the ecclesiastical superior and to receive from him the decision which Mother Mary had refused to give. Sister Saint Ange approved of the step; and, besides, she permitted Irma, in anticipation of her departure, to spend ten days with her family before going to Le Mans.

CHAPTER XII

IRMA AT SAINT SERVAN, RENNES, LE MANS, RUILLÉ—DEPARTURE FOR AMERICA

IRMA'S letter announcing her coming was received at Saint Servan the same day that she herself arrived. Her parents' joy at welcoming her was mingled with anxiety, however, for Mother Mary in telling them that Monseigneur de la Hailandière eagerly wished for Irma, had assured them that under no circumstance would she go to America without returning home to bid them a last adieu. Her arrival in the family, which at any other time would have been a source of great joy, seemed now but the announcement of a new sacrifice. Irma did not conceal the object of her journey to Le Mans; as nothing was decided, however, her parents, seeing their daughter so fragile and delicate, began to cherish the hope that her health, which had hitherto caused them so much anxiety, would now be the happy means of keeping her in France.

As for Irma, from the moment that she had resolved to accept the decision of Monseigneur Bouvier as the expression of God's holy will for her, all her former calm and cheerfulness returned. Nothing henceforth could trouble the peace of her soul. She devoted herself completely to her family, forgetting herself in order to console, counsel, and encourage her parents and sisters, showing herself happy to see them again, and giving no sign of sadness at the coming separation. With the

greatest satisfaction she welcomed her dear poor, who hastened to express their affection and gratitude.

Pleasant days pass quickly, and scarcely had her friends begun to enjoy her presence when she had to leave them. Madame le Fer went with her to Rennes —to Rennes, where she had been so happy when she hoped to keep her daughter in France. There, in the little chapel of the Sisters of Providence where she had thanked God for this favor, she came weeping to-day, opening her heart to the Heart of Jesus and looking to Him for the strength to accomplish this double sacrifice; for surely a mother gives her child twice when she offers her to the foreign missions. Madame le Fer returned home, waiting with painful anxiety for the decision of the venerable prelate. After some days of anguish she received the following letter:

Ruillé-sur-Loir, July 11, 1841.

My dear Father and Mother: At last I am to go to Vincennes. I have received a positive and definitive answer from the Bishop of Le Mans. He read father's letter and gave me one for the Superior General, who sees clearly the divine will in the result of all these circumstances. He approves of my conduct, and God gives me the great comfort of now following only His will as manifested by my superiors. I am truly very happy. For a long time you have known the aspirations of my soul regarding my beautiful vocation. Together let us thank God for His mercy. My beloved sisters, unite your gratitude with mine.

I arrived at Laval at two o'clock and thought I was at Fougères. After a rather annoying delay, a good officer took charge of my parcels and myself, and conducted me to the *Tête Noire,* where I spent the night very quietly. In the afternoon I went to see the Fathers at Saint Michael's, but our good friend Father Besnoin was not there. The superior was very fatherly and said

that he would write to him, so that the good Father would celebrate the Holy Sacrifice for our intentions.

The next day—Thursday—at three o'clock I arrived at Le Mans, and at four I was at the bishop's residence. I spoke to Monseigneur Bouvier as frankly as if I had to die twenty minutes after. I told him everything, from the cup of coffee, obligatory every morning, to the cold feet. I had made a little list of my impediments; so be tranquil. The good bishop made me remain at Le Mans a day to rest, and yesterday, the 10th, I traveled to Ruillé with the new chaplain, whose company made the journey very pleasant.

I cannot tell you exactly when Abbé Moreau's Brothers will leave Havre for New York. Be kind enough to write to Rennes, which is the center of deliberation. It is impossible for them to go before the 24th instant. They will inform me of the date from Le Mans. Our good Mother is busy preparing everything for me. She is as disinterested as ever, and does not wish you to send me any money. The letter you forwarded to me was from this dear superior, who told me she highly approved of my conduct and of my stay in Le Mans. I spent two very pleasant days with the two Carmelites, Chatellier. We talked a long time of you all and of their family.

"I thought," said Madame le Fer, "that I had prepared my heart for this cruel separation, and yet it was with inexpressible sorrow that I learned the certainty of my daughter's approaching departure. Then, O my God! taking pity on my weakness, you inspired her to write this second letter, which was received three days after the first."

Ruillé, July 14, 1841.

My dearest Mother:

God is going to grant me the greatest grace He can bestow, that of taking my vows before starting for America. Next Sunday, at eight o'clock Mass, I shall

give myself irrevocably to God. O my father, my good mother, my sisters, all who love me, rejoice with me! I am very happy. I am weeping, but it is for joy. Mother Mary went away this morning. She inquired about you all. Before leaving she gave me permission to take my vows on Sunday. I did not ask the favor, but God who desires to possess me inspired my superiors with this thought, the accomplishment of which makes me so happy.[1] I know nothing definite as to the time of my departure. Mother Mary will try to put me under the protection of a priest of Le Mans, who will have my purse, pay for me and take charge of everything. Please send me the address of the *Ladies of Saint Thomas.* I shall have to stay with them, and you may address your letters to me there.

Tell dear grandmamma of my great happiness, also my uncle, aunts, cousins, my good friends Demolon, in fact, all our neighbors and acquaintances who are interested in me. We must now submit peacefully to all that God has in store for us. So great a grace will require great sacrifices. How good it is to abandon ourselves to God's love! Pray much for me to the Blessed Virgin. Thank Our Lord for His incomprehensible love for me. Offer me anew, and promise that you will never repent of having given me to so good a Master. Say to Him that you abandon all your claims to me; that you confide to Him your child. He will return her to you one day, beautiful, resplendent with glory, for He will be our joy and our crown. The termination, then, of my waverings, and of the anxieties I endured at Brest, is to take my vows two years sooner than if I should remain in France. How good God is! My Vows and Vincennes! Oh! it is too much for a miserable creature like me. *Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo.*—Yes, the mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.

[1] Some years later Mother Mary said to Sister Mary Joseph (Elvire le Fer): "I would never have believed that Sister Francis Xavier could endure the climate of Indiana. I was mistaken, I was mistaken," she added in a tone of profound humility.

"This letter," says Madame le Fer, "was the balm that God applied to the wound of my heart. I almost blushed for the tears I had so abundantly shed. I thanked God for having given me such a daughter. The example of so much love, so much virtue, filled me with shame, me, so little worthy to be her mother, and I said, I too wish to be a saint. Then only could I make the sacrifice which had seemed above my strength, and which really was so, for courage comes from God alone. I do not remember in what terms I answered her, but it was according to her desires, and she was even persuaded that I was happy in her happiness, a flattering error I was very careful not to free her from. Yes, dear Irma, if I was happy it was because I could conceal from you the excess of my sorrow."

To Mother Theodore, Madame le Fer could pour out her heart:

I throw myself into the merciful arms of God, [she says,] this dear heavenly Father who has arranged everything with so much goodness. I do not wish to lift the veil of the future, and, since seeing my dear daughter, I have recovered the peace and tranquillity of which my poor heart had so great need. Dear Mother, put yourself in my place and judge our respective positions. You regret Sister Francis Xavier greatly, and you scarcely know her. Judge, then, what the sacrifice has cost and will cost her family. But you, so long a religious, and who have just made so generous a sacrifice and who lead more than we a life of renouncement of self, make one more sacrifice and renounce the hope of having my daughter with you, for yet a long time, indeed, if ever. The delicacy of her health is an obstacle, and the will of God shows itself in a special manner. She would be more of a burden than an assistance to you, and I know that you have excellent companions. I spent more than eight days with the

dear Sisters of Providence and enjoyed my stay greatly. I was pleased to be in a house where you had lived and which you had in some sort founded. I followed the rule of the religious in some points, sleeping on a hard bed in a little cell, which I put in order myself; my dressing table was without a mirror. I took my repasts in silence, and I assisted at the Community Mass. All that pleased me very much. Yet I have a great weakness. It is that instead of asking in the name of Our Lord, I find myself saying at every moment, Grant me this grace for the sake of Irma's sacrifice, of Irma's virtue.

I see my poor Irma going away without any fear; she has so much confidence in God that, in conscience, as she says, He is obliged to protect her. She would embark on a plank. I wish I could feel confident of her happy voyage. A total abandonment to God is better than the most solid and enduring ship. You will have Irma when you receive this, and I, alas, I shall have lost her forever. Heaven, not earth, will be the place of our reunion. Good and dear Mother, how much we must suffer to reach that blessed abode. Let us lift up our hearts. How many ties this lifting breaks, how it detaches, loosens our poor hearts. You love my Irma, do you not? Do not take my place with her, I beg of you; that, I could never endure. If God deprives me of her body, her face so angelic, so impressed with eternal tranquillity, He leaves us our souls to love each other with all our strength. To God alone I yield my place, never to creatures. What I beg of you is to take care of her, and to keep her a little bit tidy. It is due to her that you are not dead; you know it well, acknowledge it. But for her you would now be beneath the sod of Vincennes, not above it. Do you know that I wept for you and recited the *De Profundis* even while I still had some hope? Poor Mother! how happy I was to know that you were saved, and though your "resurrection" was announced to me at the same time as your desires for Irma, that did not prevent my offering a prayer of gratitude to God.

In another letter Madame le Fer says, writing again to Mother Theodore:

Our poor Francis Xavier came to spend nearly three days with us, three days of anguish and tears, yet I would not give them for ten years of life. How much good she has done me, my little Irma. How she encouraged me, showing me the nothingness of the world, and the greatness and goodness of God. She understands my heart so well, she compassionates so truly my weaknesses even while she destroys them. It seems to me that if she had remained with me it would have been impossible not to be always good. One evening when I had her here in my room where I am writing to you, she called me to her bedside and made me say with her, "My Jesus, oh, I love You so much!" What an impression it made upon me! If you only knew! and I express so badly what she felt so deeply. How little and contemptible I felt beside her.

Besides the favor of being permitted to seal her union with Our Lord by Perpetual Vows, Irma received another great favor from Bishop Bouvier, the privilege of a special consecration of herself, a special vow.

To Her Mother

Ruillé, July 23, 1841.

How much good your joy has done me, my dear mother! I had hoped God would strengthen you all, but His goodness has surpassed all my expectations. Sunday morning I said the eternal, the beautiful word, "I am Thine forever"; for God, whose mercy is without bounds, has allowed me to take my perpetual vows. What more shall I say? Ah!—I HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO GIVE MYSELF TO JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT. I had always desired to belong in a special manner to Him in this Sacrament of His love, and He has deigned to grant my request. Oh! how good, how generous He is! What will He be to us in heaven when even here

on earth He gives us so many proofs of His goodness? We must expect Him to treat us now, as Saint Francis de Sales says, as true religious. No, my dear mother, do not send the hundred francs; it is entirely decided. They have abundantly provided me with all I need, so be quiet; keep that for my sisters. Dear Sister Eudoxie sends you her kind regards; she will be glad to give you more news of the trunk. We have cozy chats together. It is a great comfort that God gives me an opportunity to ask and receive advice. My health is better, and for some days past I have had a better appetite.

Recommend me to the prayers of all those who are interested in the mission of Vincennes; for this concerns not only my own salvation and perfection, but the salvation of many souls, who, perhaps, would be saved if I were more perfect. I must give out of my abundance, though I have scarcely even what is necessary. I must become a Saint Francis Xavier, and live by sacrifices only, interior mortification, and self-denial; otherwise I shall be unworthy of my vocation. Do not fear, my dear parents; God will do His work gently in me. You know His tenderness; be also assured of mine.

To Her Sister Pepa

Ruillé, July 31, 1841.

Well, my dear Pepa, your poor sister is at last going to have the happiness of taking her flight to America to gain souls to Jesus our Savior. Rejoice with me, for I am very happy. I used to add "humanly" to "happy" to please you; but to-day, you understand, the soul's happiness is a thousand times above any natural satisfaction, for joy of heart surpasses all that the world can give. I think you are in so good a path that I must congratulate rather than counsel you. Still, you must advance along the broad straight road that God has set you in, otherwise you will be more culpable than another who has to walk in a rough and narrow path. Have great confidence in Jesus and Mary, and make

some meditation; but never on "dead shrubs" or on "roses withered in this valley of time."

The life of Jesus, His doctrine, His Passion, heaven, eternity, these subjects nourish the soul; all else enervates instead of strengthening it. You know I can speak on this subject from experience.[1]

I shall leave Providence [the convent] of Ruillé Monday evening. Pray for me. Mother Mary has recommended me to the Abbé Bellier. The maid from Rennes will be my servant, which is not very apostolic, I know, but it is the will of God, for it is my superior's will.

To Her Mother

Havre, Friday, August 7, 1841.

I arrived here at two o'clock. Three leagues of the journey was by sea, and I, together with three-fourths of the passengers, had to pay tribute. I should have been much amused at these improvised hospital scenes if I had not been one of the actors. I am better now, and I have just dined with the Religious of the Sacred Heart, whom I do not know but who received me very kindly. In a few hours I shall be at St. Thomas's.

The Lord in His goodness gave me as traveling companions not only six Brothers and two priests from Le Mans, but a pious layman also, M. Dupont, a resident of Tours. He was with me in the front part of the stage, the ecclesiastics being inside. We spent a night as if at the gate of heaven. We spoke continually of Jesus and Mary. He is twenty-five times more devout than I am. After the beads he made me say a great many *Aves* for the conversion of sinners and the perseverance of persons in whom he is specially interested. Then from eleven o'clock till midnight we made the Way of the Cross on an indulgenced crucifix. We took turns in meditating aloud. When he proposed it I thought it would make me laugh, or, if I had beautiful thoughts, inspire me with vanity. Alas! dear mother,

1 Reference to her own girlish melancholy.

if you could know what depth of faith, simplicity, and love there is in the heart of this man! Instead of laughing, I wept. We could not tear ourselves away from the Cross of Jesus, at the foot of which we found Mary, His Mother. This truly apostolic man is spending his time making pilgrimages to shrines of our Blessed Lady. He intends soon to publish, from the data he has gathered, a book which will suggest a pilgrimage for every day of the year, and appropriate meditations composed by one of his ecclesiastical friends. He is going to Brittany to study more closely the miracles of Our Lady of Rençaie; thence he will go to Saint Jouan, beginning with the humble little pilgrimage of Our Lady of Lorette. With what pleasure I gave him that address. He will see grandmother's little chapel, and he will see you. He is a saint, an angel, whom God has sent me on my journey to sustain and humble me; for I am a worm before his profound faith and his sublime humility.

Whenever he saw a church steeple, he would recite in Latin a prayer of Saint Francis Assisi, "There and in all the churches of the world you are present, O Jesus!" he would say. His soul would then seem to melt away in thinking of the love of Our Lord. I went to sleep, but he continued his meditations until morning; and when I awoke he said to me, quoting a saint, "We must speak of God or keep silence." We did speak of our good Savior and, to profit by his counsels and example, I, in my turn, speak to you of Jesus, so kind, so generous to your child.

Good-by, my dear mother; be hopeful and thankful. I feel more happy than ever, but also extremely weak. Pray much, redouble your prayers. Sunday evening or Monday morning I shall begin my great journey. My visible angel took care of all my affairs, helped me on leaving the ship, and conducted me to these good religious, whom he knows.[1]

[1] This pious traveler who happened to meet Sister Saint Francis Xavier on her way to Havre must have been already recognized by the reader as the "Holy Man of Tours," Monsieur Léon Dupont. The saintly man remained ever afterwards the faithful friend of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. It may

To Her Father

Havre, August 8, 1841.

If the wind is favorable, we shall start in a few hours. I am incomparably better than I expected to be. My heart is now very peaceful, but the *Iowa* [the name of the ship] will give it some tosses.

The Ladies of Saint Thomas received me very kindly. I found in Mother Protet a true compatriot and a perfect religious. The Ladies of the Sacred Heart treat me as their Sister, and the superior makes me sleep in her room. This one example will give you an idea of her attentions. Father Sorin [1] is very kind, and we shall have Mass on board. The maid from Rennes has not come; fortunately, for these Ladies have two lay Sisters, and she would have embarrassed me greatly. God does all things well; therefore, let us leave all to Him and be satisfied to love Him. I have received all your letters; a thousand thanks to mamma, to my sisters and little Louis.

Since morning I have been dressed somewhat like a lady. I have a black bonnet, and I wear a shawl over my religious dress. This pleases the Superior of the Sacred Heart, as otherwise I alone should have been in a religious costume. On my arrival in New York I shall go with these Ladies to their convent. M. Dupont gave me twenty-four francs for Providence at Saint

be of interest to know with what esteem the "Holy Man of Tours" regarded Sister Saint Francis Xavier. In presenting the "Life of Marie Eustelle" to the Rev. E. Sorin, C.S.C., August, 1844, he wrote the following: "I shall send a copy of this beautiful work to dear Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Oh! she will understand and appreciate the great love of Marie Eustelle for our good Savior Jesus. How happy I should be could I induce a soul as strong as that of Sister Saint Francis Xavier to join in your work! But such a soul as hers one rarely meets."

1 Father Sorin, a member of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, a missionary society of priests founded at Le Mans by Abbé Moreau, was sent to take part in the conversion of Indiana. With six Brothers of his Order he went to Saint Peter's in the diocese of Vincennes; but after a short stay he proceeded to northern Indiana, and founded the mission of Notre Dame, near South Bend. In the course of time, this Indian missionary station developed into one of the largest religious educational institutions in the country, Notre Dame University.

Mary-of-the-Woods; we do not often meet such a man as he is. My sisters might collect something from good Marianne Longueville. Before you receive this letter we shall have weighed anchor; we start at two o'clock Sunday afternoon.

I feel the effect of your prayers. I receive prodigious graces, and my heart is not troubled on leaving. My good parents, I have always loved you tenderly, but I love you a thousand times more since you have given me to Jesus. Continue your prayers for me and ask all the family, not forgetting my dear cousins of Rosais, to pray for me too.

Abbé Moreau[1] did not then go to America, but he went as far as Havre with the members of his congregation, Abbé Sorin and the six Brothers, who were to precede him to that country. The maid from Rennes was to have care of Irma who, during the voyage, was to be under the protection of two priests. As it would not have been proper for her to travel alone with them if there had been no women on board, she was greatly distressed when at the time of departure she learned that Abbé Bellier was detained in France and that the young girl of Rennes would not go without him.

To her sister Eugenie, Irma wrote:

I tell you, and you only, that on Monday I was not certain of going, for if there had been no women on the ship, I would not have embarked; but, fortunately, I can go with the Religious of the Sacred Heart. I must tell you, too, that my trunk, which contains all my things, and which ought to have been here two days ago, has not yet come. I leave to-morrow without having

[1] In 1836 Abbé Antoine Moreau accepted the Brothers of Saint Joseph established at Ruillé-sur-Loir by Abbé François Dujarié, their founder (also founder of the Sisters of Providence of Ruillé-sur-Loir). Abbé Moreau united the Brothers of Saint Joseph to the society of missionary priests that he had founded, and thus formed the Congregation of the Holy Cross, of which he was the first Superior General.

the least little thing with me, not even my pocket-book. Do not be troubled; God gives me the consolation of going like an apostle. I say this so that you may thank God for the trials He sends me.

Writing from New York she referred again to the events of her departure:

For a long time I have known how infinitely good Jesus is, but during these months especially I have experienced His tenderness. You know how undecided my future was when I went home from Brest. I told you, too, of my night of anguish there. Well, God permitted Monseigneur Bouvier to decide positively that my vocation was for Vincennes. He permitted me to see the Superior General and receive her last counsels. And then, and then this grace which surpasses all others —I took my vows; and to the mission of Vincennes I owe this happiness. But the time of trial came. I had to leave Providence and go to Le Mans; there I learned that Abbé Bellier was not going to America. Fiat! Was the young girl from Rennes going? They knew nothing of her. Fiat! My trunk was lost and I really had nothing. Fiat! This word was my strength and my hope. But at last the trunk did come,[1] four hours before my departure, and with my companions I took

[1] In some reminiscences of the "Holy Man of Tours," written by Sister Mary Joseph—Sister Saint Francis Xavier's sister Elvire—reference is made to this journey and the lost trunk. "When they arrived at Le Mans, our travelers went to the convent of the Sisters of Providence. The superior of that house having asked my sister whether she had a trunk was answered in the affirmative. But where was it? That was a difficult question to answer. Monsieur Dupont went to the different coaches to make inquiries, but with no success. He, however, returned to Sister Saint Francis, who was to leave for Havre early the next morning, and told her not to worry about the trunk, for Saint Anthony would find it. He was going to pray for this intention and she must do likewise. Later the Sisters, as usual, closed the large front gate of the convent before retiring for the night. When the portress rose the next morning at five o'clock, she found a trunk inside the court on the pavement near the door, although the latter was bolted. Nobody had rung the bell, nobody had opened the door. The trunk was not there when the Sisters retired, but it was there now! The event caused no surprise to Monsieur Dupont. Saint Anthony had taken care of the trunk while they were occupied with Our Lord."

the stage. On reaching Havre we learned that the passage of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart had been engaged on the *Iowa,* and the Brothers and mine on the *Victoria.* What were we to do? Monsieur Dupont began to pray, and I waited in peace. After much trouble and the loss of one thousand francs, we found ourselves on board the *Iowa* without Abbé Bellier or the maid.

You understand, dear Eugenie, what a favor it has been for me to travel with these religious. They were to have left two months ago. Who detained them? God, who knew I expected all from Him. What would have become of me? For on my arrival in New York, Abbé Sorin alone could not have taken care of me. "Providence of God, refuge of the miserable and repose of the heart," You had an asylum for me, and that asylum was the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

PART TWO—AMERICA (INDIANA)

CHAPTER I

THE VOYAGE—NEW YORK

THOUGH the following letters are dated from on board the *Iowa* and from New York, they are connected with the missionary life of Sister Saint Francis Xavier, and are therefore joined to her correspondence from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods:

To Her Sister Cecile

On board the *Iowa,*
Aug. 28, 1841 (Saint Augustine's day).

You asked me to keep a journal, dear sisters. I shall epitomize in two lines the first twenty days of my voyage: Sea-sickness reduced me to the state of an infant in swaddling clothes; this is the unvarnished truth. I could not help myself in any way, and was cared for by the good Ladies of the Sacred Heart and our American negress, Rebecca. I gave the latter a medal of the Blessed Virgin, which she put around her neck. I preach English sermons to her; you can imagine how eloquent they are. I am taking English lessons from one of the passengers, Mr. Carls, who has a daughter of twenty-three on whom I am exercising my zeal. She is a thousand times more pliable than my flinty Foote, and I hope for good results from a novena that we are making for her and her father, who is also very good. I have to limit my outward zeal to these two and Captain Falk, for a troop of actors and actresses make up the rest of the passengers, and as Madame Bathilde does not

think it proper for us to associate with them, she does not allow me to give them little sermons.

We have been almost a month on the *Iowa*. How good God is! We have had Mass six times and I have received Holy Communion five times. If you knew how happy we are when our Divine Savior comes into our little cabin to encourage and strengthen us! We have very poor ornaments; our chalice is copper, but the priest is gold. He has the heart of an apostle, the simplicity of the dove mingled with the wisdom of the serpent. He is admirable among his Brothers, who are in the steerage for the sake of holy poverty; they do their own cooking, whilst we are in gilded salons and at a table where art and nature vie with each other to flatter the senses. Oh! how happy they are! When shall I, too, be poor? Day before yesterday we had the happiness of seeing a little girl two years old receive baptism; she died shortly after, our deputy for the mission of Vincennes. The sea has her body, but heaven, her soul.

When you receive this letter I shall doubtless have begun my missionary career. O my beautiful vocation! If I could but understand it well! Help me by your prayers. Remember I am working for the whole family. Hereafter I shall write to you but seldom, for several reasons: the cost of postage, want of time—for there they have work for thirty Sisters—and especially, Cecile, for another motive that you will guess. Yes, to gain souls to God and to correspond with my sublime vocation I must make sacrifices. As I shall offer them for you, you must not ask any more long letters. Help me in my pious designs, for, like the great apostle who leaped for joy when he thought of the chains awaiting him at Jerusalem, I say with him, "What are you doing? why weaken my courage by your tears?" O Paul! chains and death do not move you, nor the tears of your brothers disturb you.[1]

[1] Madame le Fer, understanding the meritorious sacrifice that her daughter wished to impose on herself, but which would have weighed heavily on all the family, entreated Mother Theodore to allow Irma to continue her regular correspondence, which request was granted.

On the 4th of September she wrote to her little brother Louis, giving him some details about the *Iowa:*

It is but right to answer your pretty letter, since you ask so modestly for only a little page, and since you have done so great a service to my goddaughter by saving her from the goat's horns; but this short page will give you a great deal of news, and I know how charmingly you will tell it.

Our packet is one hundred and fifty feet long; that is very large, you see, but it is impossible for me to tell you how beautiful it is. The doors of our rooms are of citron and mahogany, the locks of silver. We have met several vessels on our route, but ours has outdistanced them all. You would see on board some beautiful birds that the passengers are taking with them; also a large cow, some sheep, pigs, ducks, chickens, and rabbits, which serve us for food. You would enjoy yourself climbing up the masts, but you would also see some little boys of your own age in the steerage, carrying water, cooking, and obeying their parents promptly. These are six little Germans who like me very much. I gave them some pictures and medals. They come and make the sign of the cross for me; it is all they can say, as they do not know French. I trust my little Louis has become very gentle, now that he is seriously preparing for the great day of his First Holy Communion. I hope that he no longer makes the plank;[1] that he has

1 An allusion to one of the tricks of her little brother, who, when about to be punished, would often take flight to the garden, and throw himself on his back in one of the paths, stiff, heavy, inert, his arms stuck to his sides, giving no hold to his poor mother, who was thus forced to let the naughty child alone. He called this trick his PLANK OF SAFETY. The same little brother, surnamed *petit loup* (little wolf), had a very decided taste for apples and pears, which his eldest sister kept locked up. He used, therefore, to inquire very anxiously about her health. Every morning he would ask with solicitude, "How is your head to-day, my poor sister?" And if the reply was plaintive and the sick one was in bed, he would find means of secretly taking the key of the fruit room and eating apples in his Eden. One day his sister got up in spite of her headache and locked the "little wolf" in his pen. Little Louis was terribly alarmed and begged her to open the door lest his parents should learn his misdeed. Sister Saint Francis, to whom they related this incident, said: "What, my dear Eugenie! God, to punish our

forgotten the road to the fruit room, and that his marks are excellent. I embrace you with all my heart.

To Her Mother

In Sight of New York,
Sept. 12, 1841.

Blessed be God! We are now near New York, and by the time I finish this letter we shall have arrived, after five weeks of the most happy and peaceful voyage that our heavenly Father could give us; not a single stormy day. God who calms the impetuosity of the waves to let the halcyons build their nests, knew how weak a creature was sailing that sea, and He suspended the storms for fear their violence should cause my death; for, notwithstanding the calm, I was sick almost incessantly for twenty days. Still, the sea has not been so bad, even for a quarter of an hour, as it was from Honfleur to Havre. The upsetting those three leagues gave me made me write to the Superior General that I certainly could not reach New York alive. I predicted my death so positively that now I scarcely dare tell her I am still living. You ask me for my journal. I have sent it to Cecile in three lines, and I have given Louis the exterior news.

News of my soul would please you perhaps yet more, my dearest mother. Well, I shall tell you that the weather was but an image of the peace I felt during our happy voyage. It is true I was not able to enjoy the beauties of nature; once only did I see the sun set and the moon rise; during three weeks it was impossible for me to look at the water two minutes, and even afterwards I could not look out over the vast expanse of the sea without feeling sick. Still, I received Holy Communion as often as we had Mass, which happiness God gave me nine times. Then when my health permitted, I followed the exercises of my good companions. All six of us were in a little cabin that served as a chapel, recrea-

first parents for their gluttony, drove them from the terrestrial paradise, and for the same fault you lock up your brother there."

tion room, and confessional. Abbé Sorin read to us sometimes from Bossuet, at which Mademoiselle Carls used to be present. I hope it will some day convert her; besides, we had pious conversations which reanimated our fervor. Finally, God spoiled me, as usual, although I have been very lazy, very wicked, and in every respect such as would displease Him, were He not so good.

I have prayed much for all of you, and I offered all the sufferings of my seasickness for your intention. Laugh at this offering if you wish. I do not forget that the 13th is your feast, as well as my dear Eugenie's, whom I embrace with all the others.

On leaving Havre the only sensation I experienced was one of haste. We left so hurriedly that I had no time to write to Ruillé nor even to say good-by to the religious of Saint Thomas. I arrived at New York as if I were returning from my drawing-lesson at Lorette, or from the little grove of Providence at the Mother House. I do not understand myself. I seem to be as well acquainted with America as if I had left it only yesterday. I have no other emotions than those which show me the land as one where I must make Jesus known and loved; as for the rest I feel nothing. My beautiful vocation quickens my heart-beats every time I think of it; but the words "country," "foreign land," have not yet affected me. God performs miracles. Ah! how good it is to trust in Him!

Last evening the pilot came on board to take us to New York. On seeing him in his little bark I thought, how many men for a few pieces of money wander about day and night in the midst of the waves, looking for a ship to guide it to its destination, while Christians do nothing to save souls! I, too, wish to be a pilot, and will seek amid wrecks and tempests for neglected souls —floating barks—and I will leave them only when I have brought them safe into port. One day we shall cry out together, "Land! Land!" not then the land of this perishable earth but the land of our true country, heaven.

So, my beloved mother, pray for me, for I must have invincible courage to fulfill my vocation. I must be a saint. I must be dead and buried with Jesus Christ; and if I do not die, like the grain of wheat, I shall remain alone.

The next day she finished her letter from New York:

My dearest Mother:—Yesterday, for your feast, our dear Lord conducted your daughter to port, which she had been looking at for three days without being able to enter, our packet having been detained by a dead calm. On the steamer I found a letter from Mother Theodore which was brought to me by Mr. Beyerly; eight days ago he made his abjuration, and is already almost as perfect as dear Monsieur Dupont.

Good Mother Theodore! Her whole heart is in her letter. I can hardly understand the confidence with which she expects me. On seeing American soil I said to myself, All the other passengers have friends or parents there; but no one is expecting me. Well, see what care our good Savior Jesus has for me. I alone of all the passengers had some one to meet me; for me alone were there letters in the steamboat. Still more, Mr. Beyerly invited me, in the name of the Princess Gallitzin, to go to the Convent of the Sacred Heart with the other religious. At this last mark of love my heart melted with gratitude and I felt like saying to the Blessed Virgin, My good Mother, if I ever mistrust the Providence of God, I am willing to be hanged. As the friend with whom Father Sorin and his Brothers were to stay was absent, he found himself friendless. The letter of recommendation for me written by Mother Theodore to Mr. Beyerly, in which she spoke of the Brothers, inspired this good Catholic gentleman to invite all those poor missionaries to his house. Father Sorin, speaking of the warm welcome he received, repeated with me this morning, "O my God, I believe in Your providence."

On leaving the *Iowa* and our good Brothers I felt

regret, to speak plainly. Judge from this what a miracle God worked in my favor. I could leave France without emotion, but in leaving the carcass of a ship I was sad. There it was God; here it is I. I am writing from the Convent of the Sacred Heart, where I have begun my first day under the auspices of the cross:—to-day is the 14th, feast of the Exaltation. I offer you for your feast the seal of the Sacred Heart which is at the top of my letter; the Heart of Mary is for Eugenie, and the Heart of Jesus is for you. Truly, dear mother, this may be considered a present from a person who has nothing. . . . My Savior Jesus, can I offer anything richer than Your Sacred Heart? . . .

You will receive this letter before I reach Vincennes, for the Princess Gallitzin does not intend leaving for St. Louis until next month. She received me most graciously. Although she was born in Russia, she is as simple and frank as a Breton. I am perfectly at home here; in fact, I am only too comfortable.

To Mother Theodore

September 13, 1841.

My very honored Mother:

God be praised! I hoped to be able to pronounce these words with you and to be myself the bearer of the news of my arrival. Well, again, God be blessed for this delay! No doubt it is for my good that He keeps me here. We had a very favorable voyage, which, however, did not prevent me from being twenty-six days in such a state of prostration that no one thought I should live. I fear my journey from New York will carry off the remainder of my strength, so that you will receive me in all my misery. Poor dear Mother, you will not be long in finding out what a burden you wished for; but it is God who sends me and He is willing to accept me such as I am. This good Savior Jesus, oh! how I shall endeavor to please Him, to thank Him for having kept me for my beautiful vocation for Vincennes! I do not know what He will be able to do with me, for I can not

see for what part of His service I am fit, unless at Saint Mary's they build with reeds.

My good Mother, if I am wanting in strength and in virtue, at least I come to offer to you, as to one who holds the place of God in my regard, my good will, my whole life; receive all, for I only come to obey God in everything and everywhere. I thank you in advance for the prayers you will offer for me, and also for all those you have no doubt offered for me since we parted. I was truly in great need of strength from God; and you, too, have been obliged to hide yourself in the mercies of the Lord. How much you must have suffered during this year! If I could regret anything in having done the will of God, it would be not to have gone with you to share with our Sisters their uneasiness, their distresses, all the pains of their first trials; but God saw that I was too weak for such favors, so He waited. Besides, I suppose that you have not taken all the crosses in Indiana, and that some will remain for me.

We find another letter addressed to Mother Theodore, which is given in its entirety:

Sacred Heart Convent, New York, 1841.

My very honored Mother:

I do not know whether this letter will precede the one I sent by Father Sorin which announces to you my safe arrival at New York, or whether it will be a repetition of the first. No matter. It is not too much to say twice that I am here, my entire self, in America. Let us bless God together for my happy voyage, and bless Him also for having opened to me an asylum at the Sacred Heart [Convent] where I am recovering from the fatigues of the journey, and where in meditating on His goodness, I draw in new strength for the work for which He intends me. Let us thank Him for His benefits—that is a duty of gratitude—but let us thank Him, too, for the trial He sends us in permitting that instead of three Sisters whom you are expecting, I come alone—alone with all my incapacity, with all my

miseries. I adore His designs without understanding them. Our Savior is so good; it would truly be unworthy in us if we let ourselves be displeased when He does not act according to our desires. When we meet I shall tell you all that He has done for me, and you will impart to me what He has done for you. How happy we shall be to speak together of Him! We are going to love Him and to please Him in everything—Him, who has chosen us from all eternity for the beautiful mission of Indiana. After my existence, I love nothing so much as my vocation, or rather, I love my dear vocation more than life itself, since to preserve the one I ardently hope to exhaust the other. How happy we shall be to die, saying with Saint Peter, "Lord Jesus, You see that we have left all for You."

Dear Mother, I must tear myself away from these sweet thoughts, for they make me forget what I intended to say to you.

I have seen good Mr. Beyerly, and his wife, also, who feels great joy in being a Catholic. She believes it is to your prayers she owes this grace. How happy you are thus to repay your benefactors. Madame Parmentier is to return from the country next week. I am to have the honor of seeing her. Everybody says countless good things about her. I shall deliver your commissions to all, everywhere. There is a Miss K—— here, a postulant at the Sacred Heart; her elder brother accompanied you last year and he retains a vivid remembrance of you. She recognized, by my Habit, that I belonged to the same Order as you. Dear Habit! It cost me much to leave it off during the voyage. The month I am to spend here I shall wear it, and then, alas! October 15—My God, may Your holy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!—I will try at least to be a religious in spirit. For this intention I shall on Wednesday evening begin a retreat, in which the good God will have to be my preacher, my extraordinary confessor, my director, in a word, everything. One of the religious here will have the kindness to conduct me through the

Exercises. The good Savior for whom I undertake this work will direct it, and to Him alone will be the glory, for the chaplain can speak neither English nor French. My health, which for a long time has been so dragging, seems willing to second my desire. I am incomparably stronger since the 13th, when I arrived. I can meditate an hour uninterruptedly without getting a headache.

My thoughts, more rapid than the steamboat, often go to visit you at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. I offer myself to you; I speak of the happiness I experience in finding myself, at last, where God has called me from the beginning. I make acquaintance with my new Sisters, I embrace and find the same old companions. I distribute all the good wishes that France sends you. Edified at the piety and devotion of all, I am ashamed at coming too late and having no share in your first privations, but we look up to heaven and say, "God has willed it thus. May His will be forever blessed!" Oh, yes, may He be forever blessed! I came *when* He sent me, and *because* He sent me. Dear Holy Obedience! We shall speak of thee, and, although at the moment thou mayest seem to us a little harsh, we will love thee and respect thee always.

In the letter brought by Mr. Beyerly, who came out to the boat to meet me, I recognized your whole heart. The air of America has not changed it. In attachment and gratitude, mine is the same as you knew it. Let us, then, give without reserve to our beloved Jesus these hearts of ours, which He has made so expressly to love Him. I shall tell you of an indescribable grace which my good Savior has vouchsafed me, and you will see whether I could now refuse Him anything.

Of course, I expect to find crosses at Vincennes. Until now, that is to say, since the 8th of August, I do not know where pain and contradiction have gone. I am ashamed to be so happy. I am here, as it were, at the gate of paradise—a delightful house, preventing and affectionate attentions from the religious, and the presence of our good and adorable Jesus whom I may visit

at any moment. I must, indeed, be very weak to be treated thus.

I beg you to continue your prayers; I am an abyss of misery. I absorb in myself all the grace you had intended for three. My beloved Sisters, I shall measure your love by your prayers. Remember, for two years I have been sending mine to this dear mission with many little sacrifices which I made.

I expect to leave New York the 15th of October with Madame Gallitzin, who will leave me at Cincinnati. Adieu, dear Mother,

Your respectful and most devoted
Sister Francis Xavier.

To Her Sister Pepa

At the Sacred Heart, 33 Housatonic Street,
New York, October 3, 1841.

At last I am in New York, my dear Pepa. Having crossed the great ocean, I am already far advanced on my way. To-morrow I shall probably continue my journey. Doubtless you will pray for me. I need prayers for an undertaking so much above my strength. Every one who sees me so feeble and alone says in a low tone, "How could they send this child so far without any one to take care of her?" I never pretend to hear this, but turning towards the chapel, I say: My God, is any one alone when You are with her? If I did not belong to You, my journey would be foolish; but belonging to You, distrust would be blasphemy, for then I should doubt either Your goodness or Your power. Pepa, I am more afraid of a little feeling of distrust than of all the dangers of land and sea.

In this city I found those good friends, Messieurs Beyerly and Parmentier, who have rendered so much assistance to our Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. They offered me their home, thinking themselves unworthy of my accepting. I prefer being at the Sacred Heart to any place else, but I should consider myself very much honored to stay with such fervent Catholics.

I declined, however. I live here exactly as in a community in France. I go from my room to the chapel, from the Chapel to the refectory, from the refectory to the recreation room, where I find very amiable, cheerful, and perfect religious, though very much exposed; for here they must live as people in Brittany would who have an annual income of forty thousand francs. The house is superb; everywhere carpets and mahogany doors with silver locks. I thank God for having delivered me from all this grandeur. The city, they say, is magnificent; they tell me of the activity of trade, of the beautiful edifices, of the cleanliness of the streets; but I do not allow myself to be tempted to see these curiosities. I have found a little balcony overlooking an old court where the poor and the pigs dwell, and there I go to recreate myself. I feel so great a need of seeing cabins of the poor; and these, indeed, are truly poor people, although they wear hats. Here everybody wears a bonnet of some kind, either silk or cotton, according to her means, but everybody has not shoes, and the children go about in their *chrétienté*.

My health is very good. I eat well, and I have accustomed myself to find a dish of raw vegetables good. But the corn and the oyster soup disagree with me.

Mother Theodore made a very favorable impression in New York. Mr. Beyerly and all who had any intercourse with her esteem her very much. She certainly has extraordinary ability and the gift of making herself loved wherever she goes. She is a second edition of yourself. You were told she was ugly; nevertheless, Miss Kennedy told me that last year her brother, after he had seen Mother, said, "I have never met such a woman"; and remember, he does not know a word of French, and she speaks dreadful English. If I were at Ruillé we would laugh again at her attempts, which always afforded Mother Mary great amusement.

I have just read the life of Saint Ignatius. Tell Cecile to read it; nothing can be more interesting than his history. I am indeed ashamed to have waited so

long to know the friends of God. During my retreat I shall try to forget the world entirely that I may understand the value of souls. Who am I, to be called to gain them to Jesus Christ?

When you write to Marie, tell her it was not from indifference that I failed to see her at Rennes; but having need of so many graces, I feel the necessity of preparing for them by sacrifice. I passed through Morlaix and Dinan without going to see Charles and Alphonse. I was only six leagues from Saint Méen, and I did not ask to go to embrace my dear Paul. I do not repent of these little privations which I imposed upon myself, for I tremble when thinking what my life ought to be. Mother Theodore told me in her letter that there is immense good to do, but that we must be saints. Our chaplain, Abbé Buteux, is an angel, she says. What a shame for me, what a misfortune, if I spoil this mission!

Madame Sallion and the Princess Gallitzin, a woman as unassuming as she is amiable and learned, will start to-morrow for Canada. They will spend eight days there; then, on the 15th of October, we shall leave for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. O my dear sister, what an abyss of mercy! Follow me there, working with all your strength to contribute to the glory of God. The Ladies of the Sacred Heart are only beginning their establishment here; their classes opened the first of June. If I had arrived before them, I should not have found our good Savior Jesus in their pretty chapel.

Abbé de Goësbriand crossed the ocean last year with Madame de Gallitzin. Captain Pell told me he never before saw such modesty and candor as his on a human countenance.

Despite the exceptional weather that Our Lord granted the little colony which left Havre for New York on board the *Iowa,* Sister Saint Francis suffered greatly from seasickness and had a most painful voyage. She went to Confession every day, believing herself on the

point of appearing before her Judge. She was not alone in this opinion. One day when the Ladies of the Sacred Heart had left her as if dead in her cabin, she overheard a discussion between the superior and the captain as to what should be done with her body. After some weeks when her health became better, she could not go to enjoy the air on deck without being carried there by her charitable companions; and her strength was so exhausted when she reached New York that it seemed impossible for her to make a journey of over nine hundred miles to her final destination. Madame Gallitzin, who had with so much kindness received her into the convent at New York, was to go first to Canada and then to St. Louis to visit the different establishments of her Order. She proposed to take Sister Saint Francis with her, so that she could have the rest which was so necessary for her at the different stopping-places of the journey. This plan was gratefully accepted and Irma had already spent several weeks at the Sacred Heart awaiting Madame Gallitzin's departure, when Abbé Bellier and the girl from Rennes arrived in New York. They were going directly to Vincennes, and Irma's ardent desire to be reunited with the Sisters of Providence caused her to alter her plans and to avail herself of the protection of this estimable priest.

In the last letter Irma wrote from New York to her family, she said:

New York, October 10, 1841.

O my dear father, if you knew the watchfulness of Providence over your child, you would not be in the least uneasy. God always selects persons who are extremely kind to me; I need mention only our excellent friends, Messieurs Beyerly and Parmentier. One seems to see

in them the characters of the book "Lorenzo"; only these are living and real. They are greatly attached to Mother Theodore, whose acquaintance they made when she passed through here, and they will not die satisfied until they have visited Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and have again seen their dear Sisters of Providence (whom they have loaded with kindness).

I had the happiness of making a retreat during my stay at the Sacred Heart. One of these excellent religious traced the plan for me, but I was under the immediate direction of God, for the confessor of the community knows neither English nor French. This good Savior Jesus was, then, my Guide, my Instructor. How I prayed for you! But when I think that, like myself, you possess Him in the Eucharist, I do not know what can be wanting to you, except the knowledge of your riches. I have continued here my community life, begun on the ocean with these good religious. Our house is in the center of the city and has no garden. As carriages are passing constantly we hear a great deal of noise. The rent is eight thousand francs a year; and Madame Gallitzin paid twenty thousand francs for repairs on entering the house. My health is better and I manage very well with the American cooking. They make soup of everything—barley, oysters, etc., and a dish with few things—carrots, onions, and raw tomatoes; our gormands of Brittany would prefer something more substantial.

Madeleine and I shall leave on the 16th with good Abbé Bellier, who knows the country well and who seems to be a man not easily embarrassed. Last evening I laughed to myself on thinking of his physiognomy and his petulance; he speaks with a volubility that renders me mute. They say, however, that he is a very interior man. When I receive absolution I shall make an act of faith before an act of contrition, and all will be for the best. Perhaps it is only the joy of being on land again which affects him thus; for these Ladies and I remember having experienced something of the same sort on arriving at New York.

Good-by, my dear father. I hope your health will become daily better. I ask for you something that seems to me still better than health,—the love of sufferings. Be kind enough to distribute my love and remembrances to all our dear relatives, beginning with grandmother and ending with Olivier. Ask them all to pray for me.

CHAPTER II

JOURNEY FROM NEW YORK TO SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS—FIRST LETTERS FROM INDIANA

ABBÉ BELLIER, the two seminarians who accompanied him, Madeleine and Sister Saint Francis spent nearly a month in their journey from New York to Vincennes. In 1841 it required that length of time to accomplish a trip which to-day can be made in one day.

At Columbia they embarked on an old canal-boat to ascend the river along the Allegheny Mountains. Here Irma finally commenced the life of privations and poverty she had so ardently longed for. Sacks of coffee piled together formed the beds and benches of the boat, and often a passenger's limb was caught among them and extricated only with the greatest difficulty. No provisions of any kind being supplied, the travelers had to leave the boat to procure whatever food they could in the villages through which they passed. Table utensils and dishes were things unknown, and for all the passengers they had but one drinking glass. Abbé Bellier had the politeness to decide that Madame le Fer (thus they called Sister Saint Francis during the voyage) should drink first, and Monsieur Tumoine, one of the seminarians, last.

The following letter relates the end of her voyage, her arrival at Vincennes and later at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Henceforth Sister Saint Francis' correspondence with her family will be dated from the latter

place, where Providence destined her to spend fourteen years in the practice of religious virtues and in the labors of a fervent missionary. She will leave her dear community only to receive the reward promised to the good and faithful servant. On her death bed, we shall hear her repeat her hymn of gratitude, "So much happiness, O my God, and for so little!" But let us not anticipate events. The reader who has followed the young French woman thus far will be doubly interested in the fervent, zealous missionary of Indiana.

To Her Mother

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Nov. 17, 1841.

My dearest mother, at last I am at Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Now, more than ever, I can say, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty!" Yes, I believe in the power of God, for He has brought me here in spite of many obstacles. But I believe especially in His love, which watched so constantly over me on the way. Not even the slightest accident happened to me. The weather was nearly always pleasant and the rivers high enough for the boats to ascend. Heaven and earth seemed to agree in facilitating my arrival. True, from Columbia to Pittsburgh we were rather uncomfortable on the boat going up the canal along the Alleghenies. Our salon and cabin was but a space between decks, filled with sacks of coffee among boxes and trunks. Our first night was so bad that a German nobleman left the boat, preferring to lose the price of his passage. One of his countrymen remained with us, a good rustic (and an excellent apple-thief), who had the happy thought of closing the cracks of our apartment with straw. After this improvement it was rather comfortable, although our only way of entering our lodgings was the weasel's. We were obliged to plead against an increase of passengers, as it was certainly enough to have seven of us in such close quarters for ten days and

nights. We went from one village to another to buy bread and meat, and our German friend furnished the dessert. Our days were lengthened by a candle set in a big red apple. Abbé Bellier would then take his guitar, and with his beautiful voice excite the admiration of the passengers. During all this time I had an excellent appetite. Our boat was drawn along the banks of the canal by two old horses, which gave me a chance to walk, for I could go faster than they. The view along the Allegheny Mountains is very beautiful, though the scenery is less varied, I think, than from Saint Servan to Dinan. We crossed these mountains by rail, though without leaving the boat, as the horses and boat were placed on a car and this in turn taken on another boat. It is something inconceivable—the inventions one sees here. But all this will have an end. Some day there will be no more America, no more steam engines, but there will still be souls. Pray much for me, for I am called to accomplish something greater than all the universe.

I arrived at Vincennes the 9th of November. The remainder of the journey was made by steamboat, and I had a cabin for Madeleine and myself. This good Madeleine has rendered me many services and she is exactly what Father Besnoin had desired for me.[1]

I stopped at the house of the Sisters of Charity on arriving in Vincennes, and two minutes later I was at the feet of the bishop. O my mother, God alone understands what then passed in my heart. For my part I can say nothing of it; all that I know is that I wept and wept.

[1] We might suppose from Madeleine's conduct during the voyage that Father Besnoin had wished her to be of a trying disposition. Be that as it may, she frequently manifested an arbitrary manner towards Sister Saint Francis. On one occasion she left Sister in charge of some articles of clothing she had hung out to dry, while she went ashore to make purchases. In the meantime Sister became so interested in sketching a scene from nature that one of the above mentioned articles fell unnoticed into the canal. Madeleine, on returning and perceiving the loss, seemed tempted to snatch the album from Sister's hand, as she exclaimed scornfully, "What is the use of an education, if you cannot watch over one pocket handkerchief?"

Six days later, I heard in the forest the bell at Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods sounding the Angelus. The bishop was walking and had left me to drive the carriage. I begged my good Angel to hold the reins, so that the horse would not upset me. God watched over me and brought me in safety to the end of my journey. A few minutes later I was there—there in the dear little chapel with my Mother Theodore, thanking our Lord Jesus for all His tender mercies, and offering Him the remainder of a life which belongs to Him by so many titles.

The next day I went to see the children of our schools, this American neighbor that I loved so much, as Cecile used to say. The dear little girls were pleased to see me, but assuredly not so much as I was to see them. I recommend them to your prayers. Only Our Lord can render me useful here. I must act as if I knew everything, as if I were capable of everything, which is very annoying, for I am only a log as to ability. From my childhood I have been told that I was good for nothing; but to convince myself of the truth of this assertion I had to make a voyage to America. In vain I have asked Our Lord to give me order and memory. Fortunately, I have lost nothing of any consideration, and the objects left behind were personal souvenirs. It seems I am to be truly poor, even in soul-remembrances, for a few miles from Terre Haute I lost my portfolio, with all the letters from my superiors. I can truly say, "My God and my All!" How sweet these words are! Say them with me, and whenever the thought of me afflicts you, remember that I belong to God without reserve and forever. Since I am His I cannot be lost, for not one of those who have been given to Him has perished. He will give me back to you in heaven, and if I fulfill well my beautiful vocation I shall not be alone. I shall present you my little children of Indiana whom you will have gained to Jesus Christ through me.

I feared that during my absence they had taken all the poverty; but, if our Sisters have borne the greatest

part, some remains yet for me, especially that poverty which despoils the soul, that true poverty of will; for I must become an American, change language and manners, and make myself all to all to gain all. More than half of our children are not even baptized. The predominant trait of their character is pride and independence; but when their hearts are gained they will suffer anything in order to prove their devotedness.

The extreme cold weather has not yet begun. Our beds are still in the little garret, but the snow no longer comes through, for the holes are closed. I am at last at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, in this forest so long desired. What has now become of my perplexities, my anguishes of last year? They are all counted by the Lord: *All things work together unto good to those who love God.*

"Sorrow," it has been said, "has mysteries and abysses like the sea." How many sinking into its depths believe themselves condemned to certain death, yet return from those depths with pearls and corals in their hands!

Irma's reflection applies very truly to herself. On Mother Theodore's departure the preceding year she was plunged into an ocean of sorrow; but the gems of obedience, of humble abandonment, were polished in her hands. Matured by the experience of sorrow, she is now more fitted to distribute precious gifts among the inhabitants of the new land which finally claims her as its own.

To Her Friends Mlles. Demolon

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana.

You ask, dear friends, where our establishment of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods is located. It is in the forest. Bishop de la Hailandière gave us the land, but as yet it is nearly all uncultivated. The people fell the trees, burn the stumps, and plant and reap. Of the felled trees, log houses are made. The nearest city is Terre Haute, at a distance of about two leagues; but

there are several houses nearer our convent. When the occupants grow tired of their location, they transport their houses a few hundred yards away. Vincennes is about twenty-five leagues from us. Our forest is indeed magnificent. The trees are gigantic; wild vines creep to their summits and hang down in festoons to the ground where, taking on new life, they burst forth in a thousand new shoots. Tulip-trees, magnolias, and catalpas, loaded with their white flowers, bend gracefully to the breeze, and nothing can be prettier than the fragrant snowflakes they scatter about. They seem like censers laden with perfumes and snowy clouds, swinging before God in the gigantic nave of a limitless temple.

You have heard of my safe arrival, and of the truly Breton reception given me on the 15th of November at our dear Providence Convent. It will appear strange, perhaps, to you who have never left your dear Saint Malo, that I employ so often the word Breton to signify something good and open-hearted; but if you knew how different other nations are from the people of that little corner of the earth! Had I time I would sketch for you something of the manners of these Americans, so calm, so cold, so thoughtful. For though, like others of their sex, the women are filled with vanity and childishness, their exterior is very different. The other day I was thinking that if Pepa had come here in her young days she would have been shown in the large cities as a curiosity; for even I pass for a marvel of politeness. In this country, hearts are as cold as the winters. I scarcely know how to thank God enough for giving me a Breton superior; for if on leaving Saint Servan I had not found such a one, I do not know what would have become of me, with my straw-fire fervor. But God to whom I had given myself took care of me, and continues daily to do so. . . . No, we do not sufficiently appreciate the grace of being Catholics, and of being born in a pious province like Brittany. How could they love God—these poor people of Indiana—since they never knew Him?

The other day at Mass I was near a lady who had just come from Holy Communion. I looked into her book and she was reading the preparation for Confession. Young persons come to us to be postulants who do not even know the Commandments of God. In the whole diocese there was but one Catholic school.[1] You can imagine the ignorance which exists here.

The diocese of Vincennes is almost as large as the half of France.[2] Its jurisdiction extends over a part of Illinois and all the State of Indiana. The latter State derives its name from the Indian tribes who inhabit it, and whom the government of the United States is constantly crowding back towards the north in order to take possession of their territory. The first bishop of this vast diocese was a Breton, a saint, Monseigneur Simon Bruté, consecrated by Bishop Flaget. One priest, Father Lalumière, was appointed to assist him, and the diocesan clergy consisted of this single ecclesiastic. Bishop Bruté returned to France soon after his consecration and procured several priests and levites, who accompanied him to Vincennes and became at one and the same time his zealous co-laborers and his children, in the tenderest acceptation of the word.

"I do not wish my priests to want for anything," he used to say. He opened his house and his heart to them, but only in the latter home did they find provisions which were never exhausted. The following circum-

1 As far back as 1828 the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, had crossed the Ohio and opened a school at New Albany, Indiana. For reasons unstated, but easily surmised, they soon withdrew. The one Catholic school which the Sisters of Providence found in Indiana was an establishment in the city of Vincennes, conducted by Sisters of Charity from Emmitsburg, who were graciously lent to their former Chaplain, Monseigneur Bruté, now Bishop, until he should be able to procure a Sisterhood that would establish a Mother House in his newly-created diocese. The Sisters of Charity withdrew from the diocese in 1843.—Ed.

2 This refers to the diocese when it was first established in 1836.

stances of his life, though well-known, will bear repetition.

Less than a month before his death, on a cold winter day, Bishop Bruté, already sick, visited one of his priests, Father Corbe. The latter offered him his bed, but the bishop refused. After some contention on the subject they both lay down side by side, and according to his custom, the bishop covered and protected his companion as well as he could.

"Bishop," said the priest, "you are not keeping any of the covering. I have it all."

"Oh! no," replied the holy man in his kind voice; "see, you have only half."

During the night he raised his soul to God in ardent prayer. The priest listened to him with edification, very careful not to interrupt him. Soon he perceived the prelate gently endeavoring to cover him more. Pretending to be asleep, he threw the whole covering on the bishop who, with the delicate attention of a mother for her child, tried to cover him again, being extremely cautious not to awaken him. Again he exposed himself to the extreme cold, and a second time the covering was thrown back to him.

"Ah! my brother," said the bishop, "you are not asleep." The two friends then laughed heartily; for in the midst of this extreme poverty and complete privation these holy souls were inundated with heavenly joy which the least circumstance caused to overflow.

"I was afraid you would take cold," said the bishop, "and I thought I might awaken you by kindling the fire."

"But what of yourself, Bishop?"

"Oh!" said he, "an old man like me does not feel anything."

The fire was rekindled and though it was only three o'clock, the bishop did not return to his repose but remained in meditation till the hour for his departure.

Numerous emigrants from the various countries of Europe—Ireland, France, Germany, and England—composed the population of Indiana. These people belonged to all possible denominations of religion, but in reality practiced none. Regarding matters of faith they were as ignorant as savages, but lacked their simplicity; an inordinate desire for temporal goods made them bring up their children without speaking to them of God or religion, and a great number died before receiving baptism.

It was to remedy this moral degradation that Monseigneur de la Hailandière, successor to Monseigneur Bruté, had called the Sisters of Providence to his diocese to establish houses of education. They did not do this without having much to suffer. The bishop had no pecuniary resources to offer them; his unfortunate diocesans were as poor as himself. The good religious were certainly very industrious. They felled the trees, cleared the land, and sowed seed in the earth as well as in souls. But objects most indispensable for religious worship were wanting. Sister Saint Francis remembered her friends in France and appealed to their generous piety. Her family were unable to help her greatly; yet we learn from their correspondence that her mother adopted her daughter's numerous family as her own, and found means of being useful to it. Silk gowns somewhat worn, dolls called "French Brides," presents of small value, but bearing the French stamp, were sent to serve as rewards of merit for Irma's pupils and to excite their emulation in the study of our holy religion.

To Monsieur Dupont

January 1, 1842.

Dear and Respected Sir:—God who sent His angels to conduct me from Le Mans to New York, took care of me to the end, and after a voyage of four months I arrived at last at my dear Providence Convent of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Good Abbé Sorin must have told you of our journey, of our happiness at having Mass on board. Oh! how grateful we are to you for the measures you took at Havre to procure this favor for us. How often in the course of our long journey across the United States I thought of you! How you would have suffered among all those earthly-minded and grasping men! How often, amid their temples raised to all the heresies, would you have looked in vain for a Catholic chapel! But I do not know which is more heartrending, to see none at all or to see such as are found in Indiana. There are neither lamps nor ornaments; boards cover the breaks in the windows; the priests wear vestments that are in shreds, and often see their unfinished churches sold because they cannot defray the expense of construction. Still, those who know that only six years ago Indiana counted but one priest, and he in prison for debt, wonder at the progress of the Catholic religion and rejoice at its success. But we who have come from a community in France sigh over such privations; so I am writing to ask you for some sacred vessels for Our Lord Jesus Christ. There are places where the priests for two years have not been able to say Mass for want of a suitable chalice. When we reflect on all this we would wish to be of gold, that we might be melted down and fashioned to serve as a vase before the majesty of God.

I am sure, dear Monsieur Dupont, that on learning this you will regret not being rich; but speak to my cousin Elvire Payan, who promised to collect what we need—a chalice, an ostensorium, and also a little incense —we have only rosin to burn before the altar of our great God. You would have to come here to know how much Jesus has loved us in instituting the Holy Euchar-

ist. For four years He dwelt here in a little cabin scarcely high enough for you to stand erect in. Here, on some boards, Bishop Bruté and his two priests slept during their missionary journeys. Through respect for Our Lord, the bishop rested at the door, notwithstanding the cold and the snow. Through love of suffering this good bishop (whom Vincennes mourns whilst invoking him) surrounded his seal with this touching device, "Where the cross is, there is my country." And you know what his native land is to a Frenchman, to a Breton.

I beg you to give news of me to my dear parents, who were so happy to see you. I thanked God sincerely for the happiness He granted to you all, for surely it is a happiness to meet hearts that can speak of their country, their Father, and their God. As for myself I shall never forget the night of the sixth of August. One day we shall meet again near the One we love. In Him and for Him I am always, etc.

To Her Aunt Madame de la Salle

Providence Convent, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods,
Jan. 26, 1842.

Here I am at this dear Providence, at this dear mission of Indiana for which I sighed so long! I have to make acts of faith in my presence here. We shall be much more astonished however when we find ourselves in heaven.

As we had delightful weather last Sunday, I went with the postulants for a walk over our grounds. I had not yet seen the effect produced by our little dwelling in the midst of the forest. It is very pretty, I assure you. I joyfully saluted the cross surmounting the little wooden steeple; and when I thought of our good Jesus there with us, I felt myself still happy, even though away from you all whom I love so much, happy in the midst of the forests of Indiana, among persons whose language is unknown to me, whose customs as well as race are different—some are Germans, others Irish, English,

Americans. But in Jesus Christ there are neither Jews nor Hebrews, Greeks nor Gentiles; and I love all my Sisters very tenderly, although we are strangers. I believe they love me too.

Looking around me I saw on all sides forests, limitless, it seemed to me, as the ocean; near by, between Providence and the boarding-school, was the ravine spanned by a rustic bridge; to the south, the little dwelling of Father Paret,[1] where the faithful assemble for High Mass and Vespers; a beautiful blue sky overhead; in the distance some white crosses, reminding us of the road over which we must one day pass to arrive at our true country; a flock of birds, sheep in a meadow cleared by our Sisters; cows and peaceful oxen, and, nearer the house, dogs and chickens. All this mingled vision of grandeur and littleness, life and death, could easily excite an imagination less impressionable than mine. But to the glory of the God whom I serve, the God of miracles, I can say that at that moment I thought of Saint Servan, of Lorette, of you all, and yet I did not weep. But when my eyes fell on the poor little chapel in which our God, the God of the universe, dwells for love of us, ah! then my tears flowed—tears of gratitude. What indeed have I left? What have I lost? I am ashamed to have made so much ado over so small a sacrifice; for, in truth, is he not rich enough who possesses God? Our life is so short, eternity so long, what matters a little more or less of happiness in our exile?

Dear aunt, if you have any more material for vestments, the best thing you can do with it is to send it to us. I should like to show you Father Paret's soutane; it is a complete assortment of all kinds of black, having about thirty pieces, all different. The other day he was obliged to put on linen trousers while his own were being mended. You can imagine the condition of the rest of his wardrobe; and still he is regarded as a prince by his confrères. We tried to make him a chasuble with

1 Chaplain of the community.

several pieces of silk sewed together, but without success.

Mother Theodore returned to-day from Vincennes where she has been for five days. During her absence I was almost superior. Ah! my dear aunt, I am willing to suffer great cold and great hunger, but to feel the weight of one immortal soul upon my weakness makes me tremble. Pray much for our poor postulants; some of them have not the least idea of true piety. But, with so little religious assistance, I am astonished to find them as fervent as they are. Some of them while living in the world were as long as two years without seeing a priest.

Again she wrote to her family:

Shall I tell you of my dear little boys, as poor and ignorant as my boldest ambition could desire? I had the happiness of teaching one that he had a soul and that there is a God. His father is a German Catholic, his mother a Protestant. Never could my old Jean Louis approach him in ignorance. The other day I was quite astonished that he knew three answers of his catechism. I asked him if his father, or one of our Sisters had taught him. "No," he said. Then I saw my little Simeon blush (the youngest of my pupils); so I asked whether it was Simeon. "Yes," he replied. The dear little fellow! not yet six years old and already he is a catechist! He had taught his little schoolmate during recreation, and to-day, as a reward, I gave him a pair of little yellow beads. If you could only see how gentle and pious he is!

The first time I explained to them the chapter in the Bible on creation I asked the difference between man and other animals. Not one was able to answer. Finally the best pupil, after studying attentively the picture accompanying the text, replied, "Sister, the difference is that a horse has four feet and a man only two."

In February, 1843, she wrote to her aunt, Madame de la Salle:

Most of the birds here are not songsters, and, though there are many red birds and humming birds, they do not sing as well as your nightingales. Even the frogs have an amusing way of croaking, and I believe my father would not now insist that we have the same pronunciation. This time last year they had begun their croaking; but this year they seem to have no desire to begin. It is excessively cold; everything is frozen—even the bread. When we open the doors our hands stick to the locks. It is impossible to understand the changeable weather of this country. Father Corbe,[1] our present chaplain, told us the other day that one Sunday at Vincennes violent claps of thunder were heard during Vespers, and after the service a heavy rain fell detaining the seminarians in the church about twenty minutes. On coming out they found the streets covered with ice. Four or five men who had been caught in the rain had their clothes and boots frozen upon them so quickly that they could not move a step. Two of them died on the spot. Another gave such piercing cries that he was heard and rescued from his perilous position. Sometimes a person's nose freezes, and it is said that in the North there are many persons who have lost it thus. Father Corbe told us also that in the course of his apostolic journeys he once had an ear frozen, and if a farmer had not noticed it in time he would have lost it. Travelers render one another this service, as the person himself does not perceive his danger.

Notwithstanding all the ice, I love my dear mission more and more. The other day I had the pleasure of taking our little boys to confession. I have for some time been giving them catechism and Bible-history lessons. The greatest difficulty for them was not their examination of conscience; they were more puzzled over

1 The first chaplain of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was Father Buteux; after him Father Paret. Father Corbe replaced the latter in 1842, and was ecclesiastical superior of the community from 1844 until his death in 1872.

the manner of kneeling down and joining their hands in the confessional. Before going to the chapel the eldest, having procured an old comb and some water, made the toilet of all his companions. They had never before been so well washed. I assure you, when I saw them kneeling so devoutly, although some turned their backs toward the altar, and others to the Blessed Virgin, I was very much touched. One of the smallest asked which was more necessary, to remember his sins or the manner of making his genuflection before the Blessed Sacrament; "for," he added, "I cannot think of what I have to say and at the same time remember how to make my bow."

To Her Father

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, April 27, 1842.

Many times since my arrival at my dear mission I have thought of you and prayed for you. But I have not yet written, so it is a great pleasure to sit down for a good chat with you. I do not know how it is, but the two thousand leagues which separate us seem no more than a meter, sometimes even less, particularly when I am in the chapel. At times I imagine you can hear all that I say to God, and when I ask for things a little too perfect I seem to hear you say, "My child, you do not know whether I can bear that"; and I answer, "Dear father, let me alone. I have made my arrangements in such a fashion that what you cannot do, God will do for you." Oh! how much good it does me to pray for my dear family, for I always do it with the conviction that the One to whom I address so many petitions is a thousand times more disposed to grant than I am to ask. The excellent news which my mother and sisters give is but another proof of the love of Jesus for us. I have shared in all your beautiful feasts, and I wish to gather the fruits of them all, since I cannot enjoy the flowers.

What is most necessary here is the love of suffering. During Holy Week I found the cross so lovable that

it seemed to me the greatest misfortune would be to live without it. But, O blindness of the human heart! Easter Tuesday our good Mother Theodore fell very ill, and it was all I could do to drag this real cross heavily and painfully along. She is not well even yet, though we are beginning to draw our breath again, for she is better. What anxiety, what distress, what anguish I had! We are awaiting remedies from Saint Servan which would have been very useful during Mother's illness; good medicines and good doctors are scarce here. They give the name of "Doctor" to a certain American who orders red-pepper powders for all diseases of the throat. I do not believe myself obliged to consider him a doctor.

In Indiana nature follows the same course as in France, but some days are *bizarre*. Thus in mid-February when all the trees are leafless, there comes a day so warm that the frogs begin to croak, and the birds to sing; the fleas and mosquitoes sally forth, and there are electric storms and the atmosphere is so heavy one can scarcely breathe. Then the cold returns. This winter God has had pity on me; with the exception of a few days, we have had the same temperature as in France. For thirteen years they have not had so mild a winter. Is not this again a great goodness of God towards His feeble creature? My health is very much better; except as to rising, I can follow the rule exactly. Sleepiness is a family malady. I stay in bed until six o'clock without losing any time, except in warring with Monsieur Mosquito and Madame Flea. You and Pepa would make beautiful dialogues on the subject. I hope to write you a treatise on the relative merits and demerits of mosquitoes and fleas, and I shall dedicate it to Cecile, hoping to reconcile her with this hungry tribe.

Our forest is very beautiful now; it is almost equal to Fénelon's happy island. We have sugar-trees from which, if incisions are made in the trunk, a delicious liquid flows out. The hens lay their eggs in our beds, and sometimes even in our caps. Every morning I

find one on my coverlet. Cows and sheep graze at will without any other housing than the forest, where green, yellow, and red birds sing. Wood is commoner than dust, and the soil is so good that a man with a single horse can cultivate it. Pork is two cents a pound; beef *idem;* butter eight cents; eggs are five cents a dozen; but workmen charge so much that, with all this cheap living, we are still very poor. We have thirteen very nice pupils; they are beginning to like the Catholic religion, and several, I hope, will be baptized soon.

How pleased you would be here during the winter, dear father, you who so love good fires! You would not have to say, "Children, be sparing of the wood." Wood or lumber here takes the place of stone and mortar for buildings. The walls of our dwelling are only half an inch thick; the roof also is of wood. You can understand how very light these houses are. When our Sisters first established themselves here, and found that the Breton peasants who came with them had built their houses too near Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, they had only to say, "Good people, move your house away"; and ten days later the peasants were living several hundred feet farther off. There are things here which go beyond all French ideas. Nothing seems a hindrance; every man suffices for himself and knows a little of all trades.

To Mademoiselle Elvire Payan

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, December, 1842.

Well, my dear Elvire, here I am chatting with you. I am not dead. Though in America I love you still; how could I cease to love you just because I have chosen a state of perfection? Do you not remember that the perfection of the law is love? Hence the more perfect I try to become the more I shall love you. I am sure you understand this philosophy well, for, as Abbé Cardonnet used to say, you have acquired the science of the heart.

You have not been rash in contracting engagements

for us with those persons who have sent us so many things. As soon as we learned of the arrival of the boxes at New York, we began to pay our debts, and we continue to do so. I trust our debtors have already received something from our payment; for whatever is confided to God always reaches port, and even more promptly than by steamboat.

Saint Martin's eve our bishop consecrated the beautiful ostensorium; and the first grace I asked Jesus, residing in this new dwelling which you prepared for Him, was for the inhabitants of Tours, and for all our good friends in France who by their prayers and alms aid this dear mission of Indiana. I asked for you, through the intercession of Saint Martin, a great love for God's holy will, that you may say with Him, "I refuse neither life nor death," etc.; but, above all, I have asked that you may obtain a sincere devotion to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. If we really loved our Lord I do not know what could give us pain. It surely cannot be absence from our friends, since we shall see them again soon. It cannot even be death, because death for a Christian is but a sleep; and, when those whom we love sleep peacefully, we are not sad because we cannot then speak to them; instead, happy at their repose, we wait for their awakening.

I offer the affectionate gratitude of the community with my own, to our excellent and faithful friend, Monsieur Dupont. It is a great consolation to know that in France we have brethren who are united with us in prayers and good works. Never have we felt the value of the communion of saints as since we are in the wilds of America. Sometimes we have been fifteen days without Mass, and the priest nearest to us was twenty-two leagues distant. At these times you were in your beautiful cathedral singing the praises of our Heavenly Father, while we, His children of the forest, offered for you our privations and solitude. The absence of exterior worship is, perhaps, one of the greatest sacrifices God has imposed upon me. To give you an

example of my virtue on this point, I shall tell you that the other evening during Benediction I heard some one singing O *Salutaris Hostia.* Though I did not recognize the voice, I knew it to be French; later I found it was that of a young workman who arrived recently. I was all in tears, not from devotion, but from emotion. See how imperfect I am still.

To Her Mother

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, December, 1842.

I cannot tell you, my dear mother, how much good your letters do me. I always read them and then reread them with new pleasure. I give a share of them first to Mother Theodore, then to our Sisters, and finally to your little girls who listen with great attention to all you tell them. One of our children, Elizabeth Foley, Mary Jane's sister, whom I mentioned to Clementine, said to me, "I think you wrote Madame le Fer a better account of us than we deserve; for if she knew how faulty we are, she would not like us any more." Another, a Miss Richardson, remarked, "If I ever go to France I shall visit Madame le Fer, who was so kind as to send us some dresses." They are very amusing when they begin to draw for the prizes at the end of the month. The Protestants even ask the Blessed Virgin to make them draw a winning letter. We are much pleased with them, for there is a great change in their conduct this year. Our little Mary Jane, a charming child of twelve, wrote her father for permission to be baptized. He, however, told her to reflect awhile. The young Misses Richardson, who are twins, resembling each other so closely that I cannot distinguish them, are no longer Protestants in heart, but their father will not permit them to become Catholics until they have finished their studies. I am inclined to be angry with these stubborn parents. O my mother, how fortunate I am to be your daughter! I had to come to America to know the extent of this grace.

I shall not finish this letter until we receive your

second package. It ought to be here now, for Mr. Beyerly forwarded it several weeks ago. You cannot imagine what holy people all our good friends in New York are. When they learned that our farmhouse had been burned, they made a collection for us, to which Mr. Beyerly contributed, although he himself has failed in business. He will be obliged to move to Indiana, where living is very cheap, and be, like ourselves, poor. Workmen ask exorbitant wages. One thing which astonishes me greatly is the practice here of contracting debts. From the highest to the lowest, every one follows it. I was amazed in New York to hear the bishop speak of his debts and those of his confrères as simply as he might have discussed the cold weather. Ah! my dear mother, I would rather accustom myself to eating with my knife and to speaking English than to viewing this matter with indifference. Father, too, often told us that if we could not afford to buy shoes we should wear sabots. Some of our boarders also follow the fashion and do not pay us. After all, we must take things as they are; but we religious try in every possible way to satisfy both divine and human justice.

Since I last wrote you I have had the pleasure of seeing my good traveling companion, Father Sorin. He is now near the forest in the north of the diocese. His community has considerably increased, being now twenty in number. Their poverty equals their virtue; nevertheless they are very happy.

December 17.

I have just received the kind letters you put into the box. As our friends in New York sent them to us by mail, I have announced to your little girls the arrival of the French Bride.[1] They hope it will be here for Christmas. God blesses your endeavors, for all these little presents produce wonderful effects. We have a class of boys, and they remain in the little cabin, a sketch of which I sent you. I cannot express what pleasure I

[1] One of the dolls.

find in giving them rewards. They remind me of my dear children in France, of whom I think so often and to whom I send my love; their parents also have a share. We have also a class of poor little girls. One came yesterday, who, though born of Catholic parents, had never heard of God. Indeed, it is easy to find here all the characteristics of the vocation so well described by Father Besnoin. There are boys fifteen years of age who have not yet made their First Holy Communion. My heart, despite the ice which surrounds us, is not cooled; and, although many things are not what my imagination had pictured, I am very happy and I tenderly love my dear mission.

CHAPTER III

MOTHER THEODORE'S VISIT TO FRANCE—HER RETURN TO SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

SISTER SAINT FRANCIS feared that by arriving at Vincennes a year later than the first Sisters, she would not find in the mission of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods that poverty which to her was quite as attractive as it is usually repugnant to people in the world. During the time immediately following Mother Theodore's departure for America, when the Sisters held out to Irma the hope of some day rejoining her in Indiana, she had said, "Alas! I shall arrive too late; our Sisters will have taken all the poverty." God, who knew her desires, willed her to have a large portion of the treasure she so much esteemed. The house was not finished when she came to America; the Sisters still lodged in the garret, and Irma shared in all their daily privations. At the end of a year, however, their dwelling was almost completed; but, before arranging a shelter in it for themselves, they had opened classes there for students, who were first received in July, 1841. The following year the Sisters founded houses at Jasper and Saint Francisville, where they had been eagerly desired.

Through the efforts of the Sisters, and often by the work of their own hands, a part of the forest had been cleared and put under cultivation; the harvest had equaled their hopes and labors, and the abundant crops, carefully stored away in granary and barn, gave the

Sisters promise of a peaceful winter. While they were thanking God for this favor, some persons in the neighborhood, who, out of hatred for Catholicity, had been displeased to have the Sisters establish a house near them, tried to drive them away by setting fire to the building which contained all the harvest. The barn was a frame structure, and in an instant it and its contents were a prey to the flames.

Notwithstanding Mother Theodore's aversion for debts, she had been obliged to contract some in order to build the house; after the fire, however, not only was she unable to borrow more money, but her creditors hastened to claim what was due them. As the Community was altogether unwilling that the young girls confided to their care should suffer the privations which they themselves endured, the Sisters passed several days in want even of bread, in order that the food of the pupils might not be lessened.

Of this anxious time, Sister Saint Francis writes to Mademoiselle Elvire Payan:

You have so little courage, my dear Elvire, that I do not know whether I should tell you that our little farmhouse has been entirely destroyed by fire. It contained our harvest of wheat for the winter, and all the provisions for our cattle. We are now obliged either to sell or kill them to prevent their dying of hunger. I thought of writing to Monsieur Dupont, because he who knows the value of the cross would thank God for us; but had I not first let you know our misfortunes, you would have said I treat you as a weak soul. Well, give thanks to God, since He deigns to try us. After the fire we were three days without bread, and yet my health is better than in France. American potatoes are excellent; and, besides, God can perform miracles for the stomach as well as for the heart.

Bishop de la Hailandière was unable to help the Sisters. Mother Theodore, aware of his poverty, would not think of seeking aid from him in her distress. Still, resources the Sisters must have in order to continue the work which neither they nor Mother Theodore herself for a single moment thought of abandoning. She turned her eyes toward France, and the bishop approved her project of going there to seek help for her mission. He gave her a letter of recommendation, explicit and very impressive. Fortified by this authorization, Mother Theodore did not hesitate to undertake the long journey. She entrusted the temporal concerns of the house to hands more capable than those of Sister Saint Francis, but to her she confided the care of souls, very certain that she would neglect nothing to maintain the religious spirit among the Sisters.

Mother Theodore, accompanied by a young novice, Sister Mary Cecilia,[1] who later succeeded her as superior in America, reached France in 1843. During her stay in Brittany Mother Theodore visited Irma's parents; not having known her before, they were very happy to form the acquaintance of the one who now supplied their place in regard to their daughter.

Though Mother Theodore possessed all that could be desired to arouse interest in a work which recommended itself, God, no doubt to try her, permitted that her efforts should at first meet with no satisfactory result. Her fatigue was extreme, time was passing, and with anxiety she asked herself whether, even without taking for her mission the help they expected, she ought not return to America, rather than prolong an absence which

[1] Some one having remarked, at the time of her departure, that Sister M. Cecilia would be very lonesome in France without any of her acquaintances, Sister Saint Francis answered quickly, "Sister M. Cecilia will not be among strangers; she will have our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament."

seemed useless, and which, perhaps, would prove prejudicial to her establishment. It was under these circumstances that God, who never abandons those who trust in Him, sent her unlooked-for assistance in the person of one of the editors[1] of the *Univers*. He was touched by the sufferings and devotedness of good Mother Theodore and her daughters, but not having much money to offer, he gave her more than alms by placing his pen at her service.

Having promised the influence of his co-laborers, as well as contributions from their very light purses, he yielded to the lively impressions which he carried away from Mother Theodore's narrations, and gave an account of them to the readers of the *Univers*. His memory was faithful, and the two articles consecrated to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods received a particular benediction and awakened general sympathy. Although the *Univers* at that time had but few readers, yet as Monsieur Aubineau himself said, the good angels took care to direct the publication to all those places where Mother Theodore could expect to find help. Père Lacordaire and Bishop Forbin-Janson promised to preach in favor of the poor missionaries of Indiana.

Complete and rapid success seemed forthcoming, when a letter from Bishop de la Hailandière recalled Mother Theodore to America. She knew her departure would crush her hopes and arrest the tide of public favor in her regard; but obedience demanded her return, and, leaving her interests to God, she set sail immediately. This departure commanded by obedience was followed by many disappointments. On account of his health, Bishop Forbin-Janson was forbidden by his doctors to preach; and, for some unknown reason, Père Lacordaire

[1] Monsieur Léon Aubineau.

could not give the charity sermon which he had promised.

Fortunately, Mother Theodore's friends of the *Univers* were not among those whom absence renders indifferent, and they continued to solicit alms. Monsieur Aubineau's two articles were printed together in a pamphlet, which kept alive and developed the generous sympathy that they had awakened. Thanks to their influence, good Mother Theodore on leaving France had twelve thousand francs, which, however, was scarcely half of what she had judged necessary. Other contributions followed her to America, so that altogether the amount resulting from her journey enabled her to wait for better days. She always said that God made use of those charitable editors of the *Univers* to continue her growing work. The interest they manifested towards her during her stay in France did not diminish after her return to America; they always remained benefactors and friends of the community.

When Mother Theodore's voyage to France had been decided upon, Irma announced the fact to her mother in a letter from which the following is quoted:

April 20, 1843.

How fortunate you will be, my dear mother, through the misfortune which obliges us to be separated from our dear superior! I can almost forget my sacrifice in thinking of your joy, for you will see that one can return from the other world. You can speak of me with one to whom you permitted me to give my heart. During Mother Theodore's stay at Saint Servan you will interest yourself in our work. Ask God to inspire you with the words and means of success.

In a subsequent letter Irma says: "I am not surprised that you found our Mother so perfectly according to your liking; rarely are so many qualities united in the

same person to such a degree. Mother says that she, in her turn, could not leave you without regret."

To Mother Saint Charles

August, 1843.

When you receive this letter, good Mother, you shall have probably received the charge of Superior General. Sometimes I incline to pity you. But I prefer to pray to God for you. He is so good that it would be very ungrateful in us not to make up our minds to serve Him in the place He gives us. I often recall what you repeatedly said to us in the "Little Wood," namely, that we ought to prefer God's glory to the sweetness of His consolations. We can now, both of us, apply the lesson to ourselves. . . . I have good news for you. The glory of the Blessed Virgin is the subject. I am going to copy in full the letter received from Miss Parmentier. Here it is:

"August 15th, N. Y.

"If I postponed writing, my dear Sister, it was to give you some details about a favor of which you have been the instrument. Do you remember while you sojourned in New York you lent me a book of the Archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victory? You told me that if I wrote to Père Desgenettes, I could be a member. I followed your advice, after first speaking about it to our parish priest, who asked me to inform Père Desgenettes that he also desired to be aggregated. Père Desgenettes sent a diploma for our Saint Paul's Church, named Father Varela vice president with authority to establish branches in the New York diocese. And now, thanks to you, my whole family, and I might say all the people present at the ceremony, had the happiness of having their names enrolled in the Archconfraternity."

To you, my dear Mother Saint Charles, they owe in part this inestimable favor; for it was you who suggested to me a great zeal for the Heart of our Immacu-

late Mother. Let us rejoice then together. Oh! yes, let us rejoice for the merciful tenderness of Jesus and Mary. You know how our dear God has wounded my heart. You know of the sufferings and trials which surround our future. When I complain, my courage weakens, so I try to rejoice in God my Savior. My life will probably not last very long . . . and heaven is near. I am completely ignorant of the destiny of this dear Congregation of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. It is for you to decide our fate.

We gave Mother Theodore an exact report of what took place with our bishop. I do not know if he wrote to the Bishop of Le Mans. Now is the time to repeat a thousand times a day, *In manus tuas, Domine.* I think continually of our poor dear Mother Theodore, who has so much desired to be useful to our Congregation in America. This blow will be terrible. Fiat! Fiat, O my God! They can separate the Communities, but no man will ever be able to separate hearts that love each other in God.

To Madame Parmentier

November 20, 1843.

Although we have no assurance that our dear Mother Theodore will arrive by way of New York, we do not wish to leave her in any anxiety regarding her family of Saint Mary's. We ask you then kindly to hand her this letter and to embrace her very tenderly for us, until we can do it ourselves. Good Father Lalumière would be very much pleased to see you arrive at Terre Haute with Mother Theodore and Sister Cecilia. I know others who would share his joy, but I must not think too much of it, for perhaps it is not the will of God. We have heard nothing of the dear Beyerly family. Father Sorin wrote the other day, but did not say whether he has the consolation of having our virtuous friends with him. The religious of Our Lady of the Lake are renewing the fervor of the first ages of the Church; all who are witnesses of their piety are edified at it. We

shall have some little share, I hope, in so many prayers and good works.

We shall write, I think, to Mother at Cincinnati. Will you have the kindness to tell her that our letter will be addressed to the religious of Notre Dame? If she returns by way of New Orleans we shall be separated from her for yet many weeks. But in all those things we must see and love the will of God, for He is our Father and knows better than we what we need.

We pray for all your dear family. Believe me, dear Madame, neither time nor distance will ever cause me to forget the proofs of friendship you have lavished upon us; your goodness will ever remain in the grateful memory of your humble servant and devoted friend.

To Her Mother

December 4, 1843.

Yesterday, the feast of Saint Francis Xavier, I felt my dear family had prayed for their Irma. Sister Olympiade told me in the evening I had fêted myself. But I wept as I had not done for a long time, so many remembrances are connected with this, the first day of my religious life! I wept, and I shall weep many times again, unless Mother forbids me. I was afraid of becoming a religious, and had tried so hard never to be one, that I cannot, without tears, think of the infinite goodness of God in permitting me to belong to Him by *perpetual* vows. For me there is no greater happiness than to speak to you of this grace. Every day my vocation seems more beautiful. The more we see the things of earth, the more we discover their emptiness; but the more we study God, the more perfections we find in Him. Dear mother, although this good Savior is to religious, more than to all others, *their* good, He is nevertheless entirely *yours*.[1]

I love to pray for you, and for my father for whom

1 "I sometimes give myself the pleasure of examining in how many ways Jesus belongs to me, and I am convinced there is nothing in the world over which I have more right than over Jesus."—Père Varin, S.J.

I am always tempted to desire the best gifts, no matter what price he may have to pay for them. If he is displeased with my ambition, this beloved father will tell me. Embrace him for me and wish him a happy New Year; the same to all the dear ones at Lorette. We shall talk about you all with Mother Theodore. This cherished Mother was most graciously received by Queen Amelia. Though in speaking of her children of the forest Mother began to weep, this did not prevent a good result.[1]

Mother Theodore's return to America was not effected without great dangers. The vessel (the *Nashville*) had to weather a long and violent tempest, during which the poor religious frequently renewed the offering of their lives to God. On the 27th of January, 1844, they reached New Orleans, where a new trial awaited them.

The day after their arrival, while assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass in thanksgiving for their preservation from shipwreck, Mother Theodore was stricken with a malignant fever which endangered her life. During the many weeks she lay struggling with death, she was nursed by the dear Ursulines of New Orleans, in whose care she had been placed by Sister Mary Cecilia, when she and one of the two postulants they brought from France were obliged to go on to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The other postulant remained with Mother Theodore. It was only after a sojourn of two months in New Orleans that the patient had convalesced sufficiently to rejoin her dear daughters, who with loving impatience awaited her return to the Mother-house. Lady Day—March 25, 1844—saw her at last among her

1 The Queen granted a free passage to Mother Theodore, Sister M. Cecilia, and the two young girls they brought with them.

beloved Sisters from whom she had been absent a whole year.

Notwithstanding the help they received from France, the community at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was often reduced to extreme poverty. Provisions were very cheap, however, and Sister Saint Francis could write: "Whenever we make a good bargain I think of my father. The other day we bought one hundred and eight large pumpkins for eighty cents. Meat is sold at one cent a pound, eggs are three cents a dozen, and a dozen chickens, sixty cents; but, assuredly, man lives not by bread alone, and all the gold in America could not buy the happiness of our life in Brittany."

Though the sum requisite to purchase necessaries was so little, the Sisters did not always have it. "After Mother Theodore's departure," said one of them, "we were very poor; Sister Saint Francis consoled us for all our privations. Often after a frugal breakfast we had nothing left for dinner, and I used to try to borrow something, such as eggs, cornmeal, or potatoes. The people to whom I applied were also very poor, and their fear of not being paid often made them refuse me. I would then return home without any provisions. One day a widow,[1] who had been doing the washing for the community, had pity on my distress. In her field she had but six hills of potatoes; of these she gave me four and kept only two for her family." The Sisters have not forgotten this generosity, and have testified their gratitude not only to the mother but also to her children.

Sister Saint Francis did not share all the sufferings of the community. The reimbursement of a small sum of money which was thought to be lost permitted the

[1] Priscilla Thralls.

purchase of a little flour for the boarders, and as the Sisters knew that Irma's stomach was not strong enough for corn, they gave her some of the children's bread. Irma, unaware of this attention of her Sisters, thought she was eating the same sort of food as the community had; she would never have consented to be an exception; obedience only could have made her accept it.

From time to time she asked how much flour they had, and when the Procuratrix replied that a little still remained in the sack Irma did not appear surprised, for she had so much confidence in God's help that even a miracle would not have astonished her.

It was at this time that, in order to explain the value of some coins to a postulant, she opened the money box which contained twenty-four dollars. This sum would have enabled the Procuratrix to purchase the most necessary provisions. Whilst our Sister was giving her explanation the bell rang for an exercise, and, in her eagerness to go where obedience called her, she left without removing the key from the box. A man who was working near by noticed this forgetfulness, and carried off the precious contents of the box. Sister Saint Francis was very much pained for having by her negligence caused this loss to the house. "What is to be done now?" she asked the Procuratrix. "We must pray to Saint Joseph to assist us," replied the latter, "for I do not expect any money for a month." This was on Thursday, and Irma interceded so well with her powerful protector that, before the end of the week, the house received in a providential manner twice the amount that had been stolen. Confidence in Saint Joseph was thereby greatly increased at St. Mary's.

After Mother Theodore's arrival in Indiana, Irma wrote:

To Her Aunt, Madame la Baronne de la Valette

Our long-tried hope has not been deceived. God has at last given us back our good and devoted Mother. You will learn from the journal which she sends to Messieurs Veuillot and Aubineau to how many dangers she was exposed and how God delivered her from them. I have read the interesting account Monsieur Aubineau wrote about the beginnings of our work; his memory rivals his heart. I rejoice that such talents are consecrated to our beautiful religion. Were he to come here now, he would see near the poor log house a fine new boarding-school in which twenty young ladies are students. Several among them have asked permission to be baptized. What a consolation for us and for you! Yes, indeed, for you, because you have adopted our work, and I thank God for exciting in your soul such sympathy for our mission.

I told Henriette about the First Communion of our children of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. On Christmas morning nine boys and six girls had the happiness of receiving our divine Savior Jesus. The ceremony took place in our new church, and although the floor was not yet finished, and there were neither doors nor windows, the feast was nevertheless very beautiful in my eyes. We decorated our altar with all the precious gifts with which your charity enriched us last year.

Instead of tapers, our children had candles. We placed on the heads of our little girls the veils which we use in taking the Habit. We are a thousand times happier to clothe them for Jesus than mothers are to adorn their daughters for a human union, so often followed by tears. Oh! with what a good heart we have offered to God for our friends in France these first-fruits of our holy mission! Poor children, how happy they were! When they had received Holy Communion, their tears flowed abundantly. They had tasted for the first time the unknown joys of heaven; but they have several times since had the same happiness.

Some of the boys were sixteen, eighteen, and nineteen

years old. They owe these consolations to you. If you had spent only that one Christmas night with us you would feel amply repaid for all your sacrifices. Our boys made a retreat of four days with much fervor. The day after Christmas they were very sad when they had to return to their homes. They asked me whether they could not communicate again the following Monday, which was New Year's day. I told them it was too soon and to wait until the Feast of the Kings. But love cannot suffer delay. Five of them went as ambassadors to the missionary, and after having engaged him beforehand to promise to grant their request, if what they desired was possible, they begged him, as a New Year's gift, to hear their confessions so that they might receive Holy Communion the next day. Oh! how the Heart of Jesus must have rejoiced. It surely said to the heart of the priest, "Suffer the little ones to come unto me," for they all obtained the longed-for permission.

CHAPTER IV

IRMA'S MISSIONARY LABORS

ON arriving in America, Sister Saint Francis had, as her first occupation, to give drawing-lessons to the pupils of the boarding-school; she also taught sacred history, a study for which she had always showed a marked predilection. Later she was employed in teaching catechism to the little boys, and in giving religious instruction to the pupils and postulants. She assisted Mother Theodore by attending to part of her correspondence, and she had the care of the novitiate for some six years before she was officially placed at the head of it in 1848.

The Bishop of Vincennes, knowing her zeal for souls, commissioned her to establish in Indiana the work of the Propagation of the Faith. Father Kundek, a German priest belonging to the diocese, agreed to be a *captain* of this work on condition that Sister Saint Francis would be the *general.* Under her direction the Sisters in a short time succeeded in forming forty circles. In a letter to one of her sisters at Saint Servan she tells of this work, and adds: *"The Annals of the Propagation* has done us more good than you can imagine; to us it is truly our history. Pepa has forgotten the letters of the Reverend Benjamin Petit; but I beg you to find them and to send us new numbers at every opportunity. In return I shall send you the new news of our mission." Later she says:

"All that you relate concerning the *Propagation of*

the Faith is very interesting; truly it is our own news. We do not receive the numbers here, because they are not translated into English. Abbé Petit's letters have been of special interest to several of our Sisters and pupils who are acquainted with him."

With the assistance of her bishop, and of Mrs. Sadlier, widely known as an author and translator, Sister Saint Francis endeavored, as at Saint Servan, to establish a library for the poor, hoping that the facility of obtaining good books might preserve them from the danger of seeking or accepting bad ones.

During the first years of their sojourn in Indiana, the Sisters were much grieved on account of the poverty of their chapel, though it would pass for opulent when compared with other chapels of the diocese and of neighboring dioceses. The poverty of Jesus in the Tabernacle caused keen suffering to Sister Saint Francis Xavier. In order to assist the missionaries, she established the "Work of Mary in the Temple," founded to procure by labor, or by gifts, the means of supplying suitably the needs of the altars and of the missionaries. This was like a first and feeble trial in America of the admirable work known in our day as the "Apostolic Work under the Patronage of the Holy Women of the Gospel." In the cities of Rennes and Tours, Irma's friends gave, collected, and made a great many articles necessary for service in poor churches.

Another work with which Irma occupied herself almost upon her arrival in America was that of making known the merciful Heart of Mary, the refuge of sinners.

"I have had the happiness of helping to propagate devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary," [she wrote]. "When I passed through New York I lent the 'Manual

of the Archconfraternity' to Madame Parmentier, and explained to her the object of this excellent work. After having spoken of it to the parish priest Madame Parmentier wrote to Paris, and on Assumption Day of this year, the Church of Saint Paul in Brooklyn had the privilege of celebrating the first solemn act in honor of the Heart of Our Immaculate Mother. Madame Parmentier tells us that nearly all the persons in the church associated themselves in the work and received Communion for this intention."

Yet another pious work claimed the interest of Sister Saint Francis. In a later letter to Madame Parmentier, she says: "If the *Holy Childhood* is established in New York, kindly tell me who is the director. I have received a very nice letter from Madame Sadlier and we have begun a correspondence. There is another good work I hope to see established in New York; it is that of the Holy Old Age, the Little Sisters of the Poor. Thus far a word of invitation has been enough to secure these Sisters. Monsieur Dupont in Tours and Monsieur Aubineau in Paris are greatly interested in them. Elvire is well acquainted with the superior and tells us charming things of those humble servants of the poor."

Fixed employments and regular work were not sufficient for Irma's zeal; she united, if not always actively, at least in heart and desire, with all that her Sisters undertook for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. She had given her whole heart to her new country at the moment when, Father Sorin having said "Sister, behold us now on American soil," she fell on her knees and lovingly kissed the land which our Lord had given her to cultivate. Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had become her new home; the superiors and Sisters a second family loved equally with the first. In the religious life, her

affection merely extended to a greater number of subjects without losing any of its ardor. She had no greater pleasure than to serve as a bond between her family in France and the one in America, and to establish a relation of friendship between them either by an exchange of letters or by presents given and received. In a letter to her mother we find this passage: "Need I tell you to work for the success of our mission? Is it not yours? Have you not given it your most precious gold? Oh! when you offer a daughter, you can refuse nothing afterwards. Is not our community like a new family for you? Whenever you are in need of prayers, we are all here to help you. Mother Theodore loves you as we love at home."

In speaking to her father of the pupils and postulants, she always said, "your little girls." She loved to make known the different members of her family to her pupils and companions, using stories and examples from her youth to instruct and lead them to God. Thus she related that, for some time when her little godchild was three or four years old, she had for her all the jealousy of a young mother and demanded exclusively all her caresses. Clementine had taken this request very seriously and, when her brothers tried by threats or promises to make her disobey, she would scream with all the strength of her infant voice, "Godmamma! Godmamma, help me!" and run to her sister who hastened to protect her. "In like manner," said Sister Saint Francis, "we should keep our heart all for Jesus, and if creatures try to take it away we should call Him to our aid. He will be much more eager to defend us than I was to shield my Clementine."

Another link of friendship between the community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods and Irma's friends in France,

was the exchange of gifts. The arrival of a box was an occasion of gladness, not only for the pupils, but also for the Sisters.

God sent us our Christmas gift, as the Americans say [Sister Saint Francis wrote]; the dear and precious box arrived the day before Christmas Eve without having cost us a cent; and it was worth more than a thousand dollars, if it had been valued according to the pleasure it gave us. There was a unanimous declaration that we had never before received such a present. All was so fresh, so well wrapped, that everything, even the bird's nest, was in perfect condition. Sister Cecilia pretends that an American bird must have built the nest, because it understood comfort so well. To-day I have on the warm clothing that you sent me; but I must tell you, my dear mother, that you give me too much. I have stockings and woolen clothes enough to last me to the age of Mathusala, and if I were not so susceptible to cold as to be obliged to wear two or three flannel garments at the same time, our Sisters would be embarrassed which one to choose for me, each coming from a person loved and having the right to my affection. Yesterday I found on my bed that beautiful coverlet you sent; as there is not one in the house that can be compared with it, I asked that it be kept for distinguished guests. Another like it, however, would be only a luxury for us, since we can buy common covering at a low price. The country people have a great many sheep and easily manufacture woolen stuffs.

Father Corbe is delighted with his stockings, and he does not tire of admiring Aunt Marie's [1] kindness. He frequently offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for her and for us. Sometimes for more than six months he does not receive an alms for a Mass.

Shall I say what excited the most wonder? It was the dog; never before has a dog that could bark but not bite been seen in our woods. The children said it was

[1] Mademoiselle le Fer, who knit the stockings for him.

a marvel of some sort, and they came in groups to see it. Sister M. Cecilia took possession of two trumpets and two whistles for her pupils, who were enchanted at seeing and using these toys for the first time. In this country they have no idea how to make playthings for children.

Referring to the Christmas box, she continues:

I showed Father Contin [1] the special doll dressed by my Cousin de la Salle, which leaves to-day to dwell among the Indians. She was promised to the daughter of the chief and is to be delivered by the missionary who has care of the tribe. I laugh sometimes on seeing the destiny of the things of this world. Thus, your wedding-dress has been used by one of our choir boys in America. Eugenie's little lilac hat has passed from the head of Lucy, a postulant, to that of Margaret, the daughter of a man who was hanged. Do not fear sending any articles that are given to you for us. The pincushions, though somewhat faded, are wonderful when they have a pretty shape.

Mademoiselle de Bechenec's books were taken to Fort Wayne by Mother Theodore. Six miles from that city there is a French parish where all the ancient usages of our country are preserved, even that of presenting the Blessed Bread. After Mass Mother Theodore remained at the church door. The poor French were ravished with joy on hearing her speak their own language. She distributed among them little books and some beads and scapulars. Their enthusiasm was indescribable. One of our American Sisters who was present cannot speak of it without emotion. Why could you not also put into the box two or three young girls to help instruct so many poor children?

If anything arrived apropos, it was the beautiful lace for the altar. There was just time to make it up for Midnight Mass, when it produced a very fine

[1] A priest and family acquaintance formerly of the diocese of Rennes, but at this time of Vincennes.

effect. Our good Mother did not wait for Sister M. Cecilia to come from the church to see the beautiful ostensorium, but took it to her there, where both fell on their knees to thank God and to pray for Alphonse as well as for all our friends in France.[1]

Communication was not always easy, and sometimes the boxes were delayed on the road; but Providence watched over them, and sooner or later they arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Of a certain box sent from France, Irma wrote:

We have received all with the exception of the *traveling* box of last year, whose whereabouts we do not know. One writes me, "It is here," and another, "It is there." I thought it was at Terre Haute, and on hearing the hammer strokes opening one which came from there my heart beat; but, instead of the so-much-desired dolls, I found fifty office-books which, for a year, we had thought lost.

Somewhat later this box reached its destination and Irma wrote:

God provides for all things. He does not disdain to look out for the young crows screaming in their nests, and He took care of the box sent by our good friends of Saint Servan. It arrived last evening after two years of traveling. I shall not tell you its adventures in the several places through which it passed; but recently it escaped a fire. The merchant who was ordered to bring it from New York with his merchandise, came through Pittsburgh the same day that a fire laid waste twenty-two streets of that great city. Millions were lost. Never before, perhaps, was there such a conflagration in the United States. Our commissioner saved his goods by drenching them with water, and then continued his journey. At a little distance from Vin-

[1] Sister Saint Francis' brother Alphonse, vicar at Fougères. The ostensorium was a present from the ladies of that city.

cennes, the river being low, he was obliged to leave the box behind; finally, however, after many difficulties, it arrived last night during a frightful storm. The Blessed Virgin, to whom it had been entrusted, wished to give us the pleasure of finding everything it contained in excellent condition. The young travelers [1] had complexions as fresh as if they had just come from a tour in the garden. Thank Cecilia Tréhouart for her pretty boarder.[2] Louison [3] was so happy to see her old headdress again that she can look at nothing but this gentle peasant from Saint Jouan, and at the shells which seemed more lovely to her than gold and silver. After the opening of a box I cannot give my drawing-lesson; my pupils are so excited that their hands are tremulous. I can tell you, my dear father, that your beautiful boxes do wonders, and no lesson is better learned than sacred history. We may doubt the purity of intention, but God can make use of a box, as He uses all other things, to compass His ends.

I have affectionately recognized all your dear and precious antiquities. I beg of you always to send what you do through love of Our Lord. None but He knows how to appreciate your sacrifices, and it is a great comfort to me to tell Him that it is to Him you offer them.

The package from Tours was very precious. The good De la Valette family, Monsieur Dupont, and Monsieur Mame rivaled one another in generosity for their friends at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Irma wrote to Madame de la Valette concerning the box of books:

How could you wish to do more, my dear aunt? If your box on leaving Tours was not according to your desires, let me tell you it performed a miracle during the voyage; for, on opening it, we found charming books, beautiful outside and still better inside, such as our

[1] Dolls.
[2] A doll.
[3] A postulant from Saint Servan.

most ambitious wishes would not have dared expect. Their number and value are a treasure for our work. The box was opened during recreation, and, could you have seen us around it, you would have laughed. The young postulants exclaimed: "Mother, how beautiful this book is!" "Look, look, Sister! What beautiful pictures!" "These little blue books, and these histories, so valuable for our boarders! How happy they will be to have such premiums!" From that very evening we prayed for our zealous benefactors. Do not think we are ever wanting in this duty, but there are extra days of *Jubilee* for our thanksgiving.

The Sisters could pay only in prayers for the gifts received from France; but sometimes, as a visible mark of that gratitude which mounts to God, they sent their benefactors some Indiana products,—petrefactions, minerals, or beautiful shells from the Ohio and the Wabash; and we may truly say they were happier in giving than in receiving. Of such a box Irma wrote thus to her mother:

This morning our traveling box left under the protection of our holy Angel Guardian. Oh! it contained many things which will delight you. Mother Theodore wishes us to send you all that might be useful or pleasing. What a generous and attentive heart our loved superior has! She, only, would have given us so much time to arrange, to disarrange, and to replace our stones and shells. But how well packed it is, as Charles would say! Please announce to this dear brother a letter with his shells. There are beautiful things for him. When our Sisters learned that you are just as happy when a box comes to you from America as we are to receive one from France, they wished to find something better than this one contains. One of the postulants, who is only fifteen years old, wanted to catch a mole and send its skin to Charles. If we had allowed them, they would have spent days ransacking the forest. They

gathered all the shells except one dozen. No one was more zealous than Sister M. Magdalen, who was until the last minute finding or bringing something. She would have sent all the beautiful shells to the good priest;[1] Mother Theodore and Sister Olympiade desired Madame le Fer to have all; and Father Corbe worked for my father. I exercised my authority in favor of Monsieur Mame, who every year gives us such beautiful books. We included some curious objects for him, although we do not know whether the last we sent gave him pleasure or not; for it seems that he receives, as he gives, in silence.

The Ohio and Wabash rivers are a source of great riches to the surrounding country. Terre Haute is situated on the east bank of the Wabash, which is about five hundred and fifty miles in length and is a tributary of the Ohio. The latter, in turn, flows into the Mississippi after having traversed a distance of nine hundred and fifty miles. Madison, a city in which the Sisters of Providence made one of their first establishments, has a picturesque site on the Ohio River.

On beautiful days in summer the novices and postulants, accompanied by some Sisters, go to the banks of the Wabash, only four miles distant from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and gather those beautiful river shells which are so much esteemed by connoisseurs. The shells are bivalves of different forms, with an exterior coating rugose, striated, and twisted, and an interior pretty, smooth, and pearl-like. Some are pink, like the Bengal flower; some silver-white with an iridescent reflection; others have a beautiful violet hue. The most highly esteemed and rarest are salmon-pink, with a delicate tint and a hard glazing. Their largest size is that of a medium-sized avicula. These shells, like those of all

1 Abbé Derrien, vicar of Saint Servan.

mollusks, open slightly to admit drink and nourishment to their inhabitants; at the least contact, however, they close so tightly that the finest needle cannot penetrate the plaits of their calcareous mantle, and their modest apparel shelters them from all indiscreet looks.

The box containing these river-shells was greatly prized by the family of Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Often collectors bought some of them, and the community profited by this, for the sum realized enabled the friends in France to include objects of much greater value in the collections sent to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

To-day, when most of the luxuriant vegetation which charmed the pioneer in the Mississippi Valley has disappeared before an advancing civilization, it may be interesting to read the impressions made by the primeval forest upon the first Sisters of Providence in Indiana.

One of them gave this description: "The forest is still a source of riches and joys to our Sisters. There is nothing more grandly beautiful than the American forests, with their air of mystery, as old as the world. From the earliest dawn, life bursts forth there with impetuosity, and circulates in all the arteries of those giant trees with their thousand arms. The morning breeze gives them her first caresses, and, penetrating into the heart of this domain, gently moves each leaf, each blade of grass. The flowers bathe in the morning dew. The humming birds smooth their brilliant plumage, and chase one another into their leafy hiding-places. The squirrels, in brown and yellow robes, bound from tree to tree by startling leaps, or again, like expert acrobats, balance themselves on the vines and execute a thousand capricious evolutions. Oaks, cedars, dogwood, and cotton trees raise their robust trunks more than a hundred

and twenty feet into the air. At these heights their thick foliage mingles and entangles, and from these networks and medleys emerge clusters of blossoms varied in their coloring. In these aërial gardens the cardinals and bluebirds build their nests and lay their eggs.

"The midday sun, coloring the luxuriant vegetation, brings to it a mysterious and fecund regeneration. Busy cities repose while this beneficent orb illuminates with splendor the compact masses of verdure. The stag, the deer, and the doe, refreshed by their abundant nourishment of buds and roots, sleep in the thickets. The hum of the bees in the hedges has ceased; the periwinkle and violet no longer fear the incessant plunder of the flies and beetles, now stupefied by sleep. The rivers have reëntered their beds, and the monotonous noise of their waters is the accompaniment of that harmonious silence.

"But who can describe the beauties of these forests at twilight? It is the hour of perfumes; the flowers have closed their corollas, but their aromas are carried on the breeze. The forest takes the aspect of an immense and majestic basilica, each tree a gigantic pillar, each interstice a niche retaining the night a prisoner. The traveler, delayed and moved, sits down on the trunk of an oak and awaits the daylight. When the wind sleeps, he wonders at the stillness of these forest retreats; when it wakens, he discovers voices hitherto unknown. He is motionless, and all is silent; he takes a step, and all breathes."

CHAPTER V

DEATH OF GRANDMOTHER LE FER DE LA MOTTE AND OF ABBÉ CARDONNET

IF Sister Saint Francis desired her parents to partake of the joys and labors of her mission, she was not a stranger to any of the happenings in her family circle, and she participated especially in its sorrows and trials. One of her first bereavements was the loss of her grandmother, whose death left an immense void in the dear home of Lorette which Irma had loved so well. Though far advanced in years, Madame le Fer de la Motte had none of the infirmities of old age, and she preserved in a remarkable manner all her intellectual faculties. She was the center of affection, the bond uniting the members of the large family, and her absence was long and deeply mourned in the household of which she seemed the very soul. Long years, calm and peaceful, had succeeded to the evil times she lived through in her youth. Sometimes she dreaded lest she had too much happiness, fearing not to be found in conformity with Jesus crucified. She would have asked God for sufferings, if she had not been counseled that it is more prudent to abandon oneself entirely to His holy Will. The Lord spared her even to the end. Her death was as sweet as her life had been. At the age of ninety-two years she passed away painlessly, like the light of a lamp, whose oil ceases to feed the flame. Irma has words of comfort and hope for all the family. Her be-

reaved godmother especially must have a letter. It is dated April, 1843.

To Her Aunt, Mlle. Marie le Fer de la Motte

God has just exacted a great sacrifice from us all! Yesterday on reading my mother's letter, which gave the particulars of grandmother's happy death, my heart was deeply moved. Elvire had apprised me of the event, but she did not give me the details, and though I had hoped that grandmother's death was like her life, I was truly happy to be assured of it. At her age she could have died suddenly, and though this would have caused us no anxiety for her salvation, yet it would have deprived us of great consolation. But in this, God who loves us with a love of preference, did not forget His children.

Last evening in my meditation I sought a motive for this predilection of Our Lord for our family, and I thought that my two grandfathers—one a saint, the other a martyr—must have drawn these benedictions upon us. But what did they themselves do to obtain so many graces? At this point I lost myself in the impenetrable designs of God's mercy. In an attentive consideration of our blessed Redeemer's death, however, I found the source of all benefits. Oh! He has a right to grant a tranquil end to His children, since to procure it for us He was abandoned by His Father, deprived of all consolation, surrounded by enemies who insulted Him in His most cruel sufferings. Now is the time for showing our love to this merciful Savior! Courage, my dear aunt, courage! Alas! how can one have it when she has lost her mother? But she is not lost; we shall see her soon.

Perhaps you remember the day that grandmother, after having spoken to us of Paradise, confessed her former weakness. "When I lost my husband," she said, "I remained almost a year without being willing to go to Confession. I was angry with Our Lord, and my sorrow was so deep that I reproached God for hav-

Mme. Le Fer de la Motte
Irma's Grandmother
(From a sketch made by Irma at Lorette)

ing deprived me of my only support. Easter was approaching, and, my confessor having asked why I acted thus, I replied, 'Because I am displeased with God; I do not want to serve Him who caused my husband to die.' 'Do not weep, madame,' he replied. 'Monsieur de la Motte is not dead; he lives on a beautiful island, of which the King has appointed him governor. He does not wish to return to us, but he awaits you and your children. Perfect happiness is his lot, and, if anything could afflict him, it would be your ingratitude towards his Benefactor.'" This simple allegory was as powerful as the one of the prophet Nathan, and tears of penance mingled with those of love. "Since then," said grandmother, "I have wept no more over my husband; I have thought only of rejoining him and of taking to him all our children." This dear grandmamma, who knew so well how to talk about heaven, once began to describe the arrival of each one of us there. The good, the bad, all was told to grandfather. I remember that my history humiliated me considerably. Then father's turn came. "Oh! as for Charles," she said, "he has always been good, like yourself; he is absolutely your own portrait." Then grandfather, having embraced his son, gave him one of the most beautiful places.

O dear grandmother! did you go to the isle of Patmos to learn the secrets of Paradise? . . . No; but she understood how to pray; she knew how to commune with the God of heaven, and how to ask and obtain all she desired.

On learning the great stroke our family had just received, I went to the chapel. There, prostrating myself before Jesus, I thanked Him for having given us so good a grandmother, and for having left her with us so many years to guide us by her example in the path of virtue. As I recall that long life, so calm, so pure, I humble myself to think I have not always followed in her footsteps. I have offered to our Savior all your tears, and I have renewed at this moment my sacrifice; for I can say that if your pleasures and joys are no longer mine, your sorrows and tears are.

I seem to see Saint Joseph's interview with my cherished grandmother. What good talks they will have together!

Dear grandmamma, prepare for me a nice little place there where the Blessed love God with all their heart. As we are the first two dead members of the family, we should be side by side. You see our Jesus whilst loving Him; but I cannot see Him yet. You rejoice, and you shall never lose your happiness; but you can no longer suffer for His love. You love Him, but you can no longer hope in Him. You possess Him in all His glory, but you can no longer believe in His word, that He is hidden under the appearance of a little bread. I prefer this happiness for you in your heavenly country, because God wills it; but as for us, I delight in our hope and our sufferings, because Jesus wills them for us a little while longer.

The last lines seem to echo the sentiments of Monseigneur de la Bouillerie's exquisite canticle, "The Angel and the Soul." We cannot forbear placing some verses of it before our readers:

A cherub said to my soul one day,
"Would thou couldst see into heaven bright,
And view the beauty of that pure ray
Which round me plays with eternal light!"
To him I said: "O spirit holy,
Who seest thy God in glory above,
Of Jesus on the altar lowly,
Knowest thou the love?"

The angel answered: "Knowest thou my joy
Of seeing our God ever face to face?
My bliss e'er begins; 'tis without alloy;
In Him fresh joys I daily trace."
"Knowest thou," I replied, "the Host divine—
Thou, who to God ever near hast kept?—
Near Jesus' Eucharistic shrine
Hast thou e'er wept?"

The shining angel did yet maintain:
"My food divine still thou knowest not;
With God to be and forever reign,
To adore and love Him, is my blest lot."

"To heavenly Bread thou dost allude,"
I to the radiant cherub said,
"But God to me gives Himself as food:
Didst thou taste this bread?"

"O cherub of the courts sublime,
Let's both the praise of God repeat;
A heaven thine, the Eucharist mine;
Our portions both are very sweet.
One day my God I, too, shall see.
But here I've ALL on the altar throne;
I hope for the bliss which is given thee,
Yet I love my own."

Having learned of the serious illness of Abbé Cardonnet, Irma wrote to him in March, 1844:

Among the many letters written to me one is missing, and that one is yours. God, who knew that I too much desired your dear letter, did not permit it to reach me. Well, I am happy that He asks this sacrifice, which has been offered, as so many others have been, for your happiness. All the family have spoken of you and the sad state of your health. On reading their letters my first words were, "O my God! was it this I asked for him?" I felt my French heart breaking, and I went to the chapel, for it is there I always go to weep. Yes, my good Father, it is this, it is suffering, that I have asked for you, if it be a means of making you love Our Lord more. I have prayed God to pardon my former weakness.

I saw from Eugenie's last letter that you were almost cured. If the Blessed Virgin has interceded for your recovery, it is certain that your health will be useful for the glory of God. But let me tell you something—something I can say to you only, for you only can pardon it—Father, I am sorry you are cured. You were more like Jesus. I have always considered as a proof of His tenderness for you this wound which recalls the wound of His own Sacred Heart, and I was proud of that mysterious favor of which you were the recipient. I made a Communion to thank Our Lord for it. Only near Jesus, humiliated in the Eucharist,

can I joyfully weep over your sufferings. In these heretical countries Jesus is so overwhelmed with opprobrium, my own sorrows do not suffice. I must offer yours to Him in reparation for so much contempt.

Sometimes children receive Holy Communion in order to carry the Sacred Host away. Others try to open the tabernacle to examine and touch the Sacramental Species! Oh! one must come to America to realize somewhat the humiliations of Jesus. Catholics themselves often leave the church as soon as they have received Holy Communion. It is for us Jesus remains and offers Himself; and since in return we have offered ourselves to Him, why should we be sad if He makes use of our gift?

I would have less regretted the loss of your letter if you had not been sick, for good news to us both will be contradictions, humiliations, and sufferings. This year I have drunk deeply from this chalice. At first it seemed very bitter. The efforts I have been obliged to make have at times weakened me. Some days I was prostrate from exhaustion. Climate, nerves, heart, etc., reduced me almost to a dying state. Then it was that I clung by the last sigh of my will to the blessed will of Jesus. My Father, God has tried us. He has made us see that man is like the flower of the field, which bends before the least wind. To the philosopher we should give human reasons, but to our Christian hearts we shall say: "There, in a stable, and on a cross is glory. A God falling in the streets of Jerusalem, a God covered with mud, will always console His humiliated children." Oh! when shall we be so annihilated that it may be said of us, as it was of Jesus, *Non homo, sed vermis?* When shall we be effaced from the memory of all creatures! How deceived I was when I thought the glory of God was promoted by outward works such as the world calls *great!* God's glory is that we love His will. And if it is His will to have us deaf, dumb, and blind, we shall still praise and glorify Him in that state. Oh! yes; His will, and nothing but that.

The first symptoms of the cruel malady which was to cause his death showed themselves in Abbé Cardonnet only a short time after the death of Irma's grandmother, Madame le Fer de la Motte. His sufferings, unlike those spoken of by á Kempis which do not render us better, made him advance rapidly in the way of sanctity; they imposed on him restraints which, by continually opposing his love of liberty and independence, crushed his will and destroyed in a visible manner the imperfections which formerly somewhat clouded his virtues. He received with happiness and consolation the letter wherein Irma felicitated him on the sufferings that seemed to impress upon him a seal of resemblance to Our Lord. He often reread the letter, and loved to say that it had done him much good. In fact, he died with it resting on his bosom. As the physician whom he consulted at Paris attributed his severe attacks to the bad state of his teeth, Abbé Cardonnet had the courage to have fourteen extracted; but he received no alleviation of the painful malady, which kept him on earth eighteen months longer.

Abbé Cardonnet had always cherished the most lively and tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and had contributed to the erection of a chapel at Saint Servan [near Villegurie, Irma's home] under the title "Our Lady of Nazareth." The devotion of the month of May not being yet established in Saint Servan, he deemed himself privileged in being one of the first to make it known and loved. In 1841 and 1842 he celebrated with all possible solemnity, in the Chapel of Nazareth, the exercises of the month of May. Every evening he gave a conference on the virtues and the grandeur of the Queen of Heaven, devoting himself so strenuously to the work that his illness was attrib-

uted to the fatigue these sermons caused him. He was wont to say that Mary has for her clients recompenses but little understood and rarely appreciated.

While praying before the statue of our Blessed Lady in this little sanctuary of Nazareth, he received his death stroke. Feeling the approach of one of his attacks, he attempted to leave the Chapel quietly, so as not to disturb the faithful during Benediction, which was then going on. Hardly had he crossed the threshold when he fell, never to rise again. His death was a deep affliction to every member of the Le Fer family, and Irma, from the depths of her forest, mingled her tears with those shed at home over the loss of their true friend. She wrote several letters on this subject, among them the following addressed to her aunt:

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, October, 1844.

On learning of the death of our friend, our good Abbé Cardonnet, I again found all the weakness of my heart. I was entirely Irma. It is nearly ten years since I suffered so much. This death has renewed the remembrance of Angelina's. Poor human heart, which cannot receive a wound without having all the old ones bleed anew! I can say with Chateaubriand, "New joys do not bring springtime to the old ones, but recent sorrows make past sorrows revive again." God, who for so many years had surrounded me with fortifying graces, left me alone with my weakness for several hours during this last sacrifice, perhaps to make me the better understand and solace your sorrow. Now my soul is calm, and I admire in silence God's tenderness for us.

Abbé Cardonnet is the one who has benefited me most in this world, for God revealed my soul entirely to him. Nevertheless, I have received a thousand more graces in the sacrifice of his presence than when enjoying his immediate direction. "If you love me," said our Lord to His apostles, "rejoice that I go to my Father."

What! the apostles must rejoice at the absence of their Divine Master, rejoice because He went to His Father, and we dare to be unhappy because our dear Abbé is with his Father, who is ours also—our Savior Jesus! Truly, my dear aunt, I experience something very singular since I am in America; for it seems to me that those who leave you come near to me, and in speaking with my loved grandmamma and our dear Abbé Cardonnet, I am ashamed to be happy at your expense. They are here, very close to me. I ask them to console you; I speak to them heart to heart in the presence of my beloved Spouse who makes them happy. We recall our family joys, our sweet religious feasts, our pious reading and prayer in common. "They have departed from this life, but not from my life; can I consider as dead those who are living in my heart?" [1]

Mamma has blamed me a little for the letter I wrote in the spring to our good Abbé Cardonnet, but I was under the same influence that he was when he wrote to me at Brest. "I have a thousand human reasons," said he, "which make me prefer to keep you in France; and, nevertheless, I say to you, 'Go to America.' I shall say 'Go to America' as long as there is a drop of blood in my veins." And I also had a thousand human reasons for desiring the cessation of his painful sufferings; but, whenever I begged God to cure him, Our Lord seemed to show me the grandeur of the eternal glory He reserves for the humiliations endured in time. Priest of Jesus crucified! Would he not regret, even in heaven, never having borne the marks of the Holy Victim whom he offered for us every day on the altar? His disease, his extraordinary sufferings, rendered him a thousand times more dear to me. I united myself to his sorrows; I saw in him Jesus suffering and falling in the streets of Jerusalem. He was my glory and my hope. I was not aware of the Abbé's personal sentiments relative to his state when I wrote to him last March things which were for him alone, but which God permitted him to

1 Saint Augustine.

impart to you. What was my joy when, fifteen days later, I received the only letter I have had from this dear Father since my departure from France! He said: "My child, ask God to give me sufferings. I prefer a thousand times to suffer. . . . Sufferings and Heaven! In your forest say this to God for me; it is thus you can offer me the most beautiful testimony of affection and gratitude."

How happy this letter made me feel! No, I cannot complain because God answered my prayer. Abbé Cardonnet has now only joy, since his trials are ended; but if our eyes, blinded by tears, cannot yet endure the splendor of Thabor, let us remain at Gethsemane, where a God is weak, where His soul moans and is sorrowful even unto death.

CHAPTER VI

MOTHER THEODORE'S ILLNESS—THE FIRST ABJURATION

IRMA'S letters have shown what affectionate relations existed between herself, her companions, and their worthy superior. Some fragments from her correspondence will disclose still more this tenderness, so legitimate and so blessed by God who is the link binding together hearts thus devoted.

To Her Mother

I shall whisper to you, dearest mother, that when I left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods to replace a sick Sister at Vincennes all the Sisters, and especially the young postulants, cried very much. It reminded me of one of our old family scenes. I did not think persons could love so much anywhere as at our home. I might, indeed, have consulted my heart and known the contrary. The time that Mother spends in visiting the missions is the occasion of real sacrifice for me. I tremble at the prospect for weeks in advance and can scarcely eat. We are obliged to watch over our hearts, so as not to love each other too much. In the midst of these tumults of the "inferior part," as your friend Saint Francis de Sales calls it, I am resigned. Happily, God has granted us the favor of better health for our dear Mother this year, with the exception of one week. How good and amiable this excellent Mother is! She has a heart like ours at home, and the tender love she receives from all her daughters helps her much in bearing the hardships of the mission.

Mother Theodore was rarely without suffering. Her health, always delicate, was a subject of anxiety and grief to her Sisters.

Our Mother [said Irma at another time] suffers continually. I do not know how she preserves her gayety amid afflictions so numerous and varied. To-day she wished to write to Saint Servan, and instead she is in bed, coughing, burning, and suffocating from a sort of inflammation of the lungs. Since such is the will of God, it should be ours also. The journey from time to eternity is so short that if we have embarked on the ship of the cross we need seek no other. When we become tepid I believe God sends an illness to Mother to reanimate our fervor. What promises we make Him then! What sacrifices we offer! Our Father in Heaven knows that mothers are necessary to the children. One of our superior's principles is to consider neither time nor health when duty calls. I acknowledge I submit with difficulty to her courage, but she has no regard for my representations, and she often escapes without saying good-by. She declares that I have said for her, "To suffer and never to die," and there is some truth in this, for I know her sufferings will be recompensed, and her death would be a great calamity to us.

We often need to make acts of confidence, for if the blow falls unexpectedly we are ready to faint. During Mother's long illness, fire broke out in our building between twelve and one o'clock at night. The Sisters were awakened by the brightness of the flames, which were already destroying the dormitory. They rushed downstairs uttering cries that awakened me in the far end of the little garret, where I was sleeping at the time, and from which I could not see the fire. On hearing the distressful sounds, my first thought was that Mother must be in her agony, and I wished to drag myself to her to receive her last blessing. I was unable to walk. Suddenly the cries redoubled; the bells began to ring. O my God, she is dead! Mother is dead, I said to my-

self. She is dead! At that moment I recovered my courage and my strength. God gave me grace to offer Him with entire resignation this immense sacrifice, the last I could accomplish in this land of exile. I wished to go to comfort our poor Sisters and weep with them, when one rushed in, out of breath, exclaiming, "The house is on fire!" "Thank God! the house is on fire," I cried, clasping her in my arms; "so Mother is not dead?" I hastened to the chapel, where all alone I sobbed for joy, whilst the others tried to extinguish the flames, which, fortunately, did but little damage. God watched over us. Some minutes later it would have been impossible to save the house, which is constructed entirely of wood. Bless Him with us; bless Him especially for having preserved our Mother, who is a thousand times more precious to our community than any earthly goods. To know what she is to us you would have to suffer as we did for sixty days, fearing every moment to lose her.

To Her Aunt, Madame de la Salle

Now that I have an hour of leisure I am coming for a little chat with you. God will not be displeased that I give this time to you, for we will speak of Him together, to encourage each other to love Him with all our hearts. You have been tried, dear aunt, in your weakest point. You have had sacrifices of the heart to make, sacrifices that are the most painful but also the most meritorious. In thought I often see you visiting different parts of the house, saying to yourself, "Mother sat there; she slept here; this was her place at table. Poor Abbé Cardonnet planted that tree; he walked in this avenue; he studied here." And then a sigh escapes from your heart. Ah! the dear ones are not lost. They see us and one day we shall see them. Let us not compassionate the mariner who arrives in port, or the exile who returns to his country. Neither let us compassionate ourselves, since we have in our place of exile the same Jesus who is the happiness of our brethren in heaven. Let us pity ourselves when we offend Him, but not

when we suffer. I have sometimes been tempted to regret that you gave me your heart of ivy [1] without giving me your good qualities; but of late I have seen that, instead of complaining of being sensitive we ought to thank God, since it is a means of loving and suffering more. Let us joyfully allow everything in us to grow old except the heart.

During Mother Theodore's illness I had some hard attacks, but our good God sustained me. Now I enjoy with gratitude the happiness He has given us by curing our beloved superior. I must ask you to make us a little present, something that would have been very beneficial during her illness: I mean a little Spanish wine. We do not need much, as a few drops suffice for Mother Theodore's poor stomach. During her last attack, she had fainting spells in which we thought she would die. I often thought of the old Spanish wine, such as you had at Lorette, but we had none. We cannot attribute her cure to either doctors or remedies. God alone has been everything to us. I assure you we prayed with all our hearts. Our good Father Corbe also helped us. He spent his time half before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, half with Mother, and although he had no hope, humanly speaking, he never ceased to hope in God; except, perhaps, one night when he thought that all was over. Poor Mother Theodore thought so, too, for she called me to her bedside and told me to embrace her for the last time. Ah! dear aunt, you can understand what passed in my heart. You know our situation and you can judge what anguish oppressed my soul, not only for myself but for our whole Congregation. We sang a *Te Deum* last Sunday in thanksgiving for her recovery. I say "we," for with no offense, I hope, to my Sisters, I sang too, and although somewhat out of key, to tell the truth I did not do so very badly. I do not remember if I asked you to knit a few pairs of stockings

[1] Her godmother's affectionate nature caused her to cling to her friends. This was a source of keen suffering to her when obliged to separate from them. Irma suffered in the same manner, for she tells us she also had "a heart of ivy."

for our good Father Corbe. I undertook to make him a pair, but it took me more than eight months, and there is much to be said about the character of the work, for I knit only in the evening and, as mamma would say, six feet away from the candle. I often talk to Father Corbe about our good Abbé Cardonnet. Father Corbe also belonged to a family where union was life. When he speaks about the Laugles he is like me when I talk of you: the end is slow in coming.

How do you spend your time? The morning must appear long to you. It is a great sacrifice for every one to see dear Aunt Jeanne pass most of her day with the orphans at Nazareth, but it is all for God. If you think the little picture I am sending would please Monsieur de Chateaubriand, be kind enough to give it to him. I often think of him; he would like life in America, I am sure. If he could send us a copy of the "Génie du Christianisme" in English, we should be most happy to have it. The Governor of Indiana has expressed a desire to read it; he went all through our library hoping to find it. Our Congregation has just been incorporated and can now legally own property, sell, etc.

When you see any members of the good Monut family, thank them again for their excellent gifts that are so much appreciated by our Sisters who do the sewing. Here a little spool of cotton that costs a penny in France is sold for eight or ten cents, and the rest in proportion; and even then it is hard to find thread. If we could send you wood, soap, or meat in exchange for cotton, thread, etc., it would be advantageous to both sides. We could carry on a good business. But there are other provisions that do not need to be transported, and those are the ones that I wish to exchange with you —prayer, good works, sufferings. Let us always carry on this traffic through the Heart of Jesus.

When you write to Therese tell her I shall love her always. I can think of no one who could replace her in the little boudoir at Lorette. O dear aunt, how often you surrounded me with attentions in that little

boudoir! I was very ungrateful to you, but now my heart is more calm than it sometimes was then. Rejoice in my happiness. I know that when I say to you "I am happy" it does you good, and that is why I say it so often. God calls you to approach Him through trials and uneasiness of mind. May His Will be done! Yet, if it were possible that this chalice might pass away from you, I should be very glad. You know that I love you sincerely.

Monsieur Aubineau, in his articles on Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, said with truth: "If Mother Theodore's health was delicate, Sister Saint Francis may be said to have had no health at all." Her desire of devoting her life to the missions appeared for so long a time an illusion to her superiors, that when she was preparing to leave Havre for New York they said to her, "You will be thrown into the sea the third day." "Well, what difference does it make," she smilingly replied, "to be eaten by fish or devoured by worms?" Although the forests of the New World did not improve her delicate constitution or lessen her habitual sufferings, she nevertheless had sufficient strength to fulfill her numerous duties.

In her letters she rarely spoke of her health unless to reassure her family. Bishop Martin, in one of his visits to France, said at Saint Servan that Sister Saint Francis Xavier seemed no longer to belong to this earth, so thin, almost transparent, had she become. "Bishop Martin has much exaggerated my physical state," she wrote; "would to God there were nothing *carnal* about me! I was indeed a little thin when he left us, but since that time I have greatly improved. Only yesterday our Sisters were admiring my plumpness. It is deplorable to be so far from one another that we only know *old* news."

The excessive heat of the Indiana summers caused Sister Saint Francis Xavier the most painful oppression, which lasted from July until autumn. She spoke of these sufferings, however, as a matter of very little consequence. "My smothering attacks cause me no uneasiness, but they always alarm Mother Theodore. I only lose time trying to assure her that I shall not die of them, for she *will* be disquieted about me. When she seeks an explanation for it all I give her the reason invented by our old doctor at Saint Servan, who insisted that the ailments of my youth were the result of political events."

During the winter our Irma suffered from neuralgia, and particularly from excessively cold feet. This latter discomfort she presented to God as the most constant mortification she could offer. She had for her use an old green carriage-boot, called familiarly the *green house,* in which a warm brick was placed. This followed her everywhere. She preferred it to a foot-warmer sent from France, which burned her stockings, her shoes, and her feet even, without warming them, and which caused her remorse on account of the dear virtue of poverty she saw transgressed.

To the French Sisters the season of mosquitoes was a veritable time of plague. But one might have believed Sister Saint Francis insensible to their stings, had not her hands and face, swollen and covered with red spots, revealed the traces of their passage. She never interrupted her occupations to brush them away. She wrote, however: "Among temporal enemies, those I dread most are the mosquitoes. An army of fleas also attacks me, but it is an army without music, whilst the *fifes* of the mosquitoes incessantly resound in my ears."

Sister Saint Francis was ingenious in combining

mortification and obedience. In summer when she crossed the convent grounds to give her lessons at the Academy, Mother Theodore required her to carry an umbrella on account of her headaches. Though an encumbrance, she never failed to take it; but she held it invariably, yet certainly not intentionally, on her shoulder without perceiving the direction of the sun's rays. She was always so preoccupied with the thought of God that she often lost sight of earthly things.

She took care of her health for the sake of obedience only, and it was even then a painful task for her, which it is likely she would have forgotten more than once had not Mother Theodore appointed a Sister to remind her of it. One winter a friend wrote to her: "You who are so frail and delicate must suffer greatly during this intensely cold weather. Indeed, I should pity you, did I not know what profit you draw from the winters, and that the cold causes you to recite with increased fervor the canticle of the three children in the fiery furnace. I remember what our good superior, Abbé Salmon, used to say to us when it was very cold; he would repeat, *Benedicite glacies, benedicite gelu et frigus, Domino.*"

Though Irma was very ambitious for the sanctification of all her family, she wished particularly that her beloved father might not pass through the flames of purgatory, but might expiate entirely in this world the faults into which human frailty betrays even the most perfect souls. Nevertheless, before asking this favor of God she submitted it to her father, in order to obtain his authorization for a grace which concerned him personally. As love was the motive of Monsieur le Fer's service of God, and fear was practically unknown to him, he left to Our Lord with perfect confidence the time

and place of undergoing the temporal punishment of his sins. He answered his daughter, with playful shrewdness, that he had just been reading with the greatest interest the life of St. Catherine of Siena, in which one passage had particularly struck him. The saint had asked Our Lord to let her suffer in her father's stead and to place upon her the expiation of his faults in this world, so as to preserve him from purgatory—a prayer which was accepted by God. Irma's father added that if she felt able to make the same request for him he would be very grateful for her generosity.

The letter in which Irma expressed the sorrow caused by her father's reply has not been found. She took quite seriously what he had said partly in pleasantry, and she really suffered not to be able to imitate Saint Catherine in this particular act of generosity. Had she been permitted she would no doubt have done so; but she could not dispose of herself, and Mother Theodore decidedly opposed her asking of God anything of the sort. Mother remembered the effect of a similar prayer made by her dear daughter on a like occasion. It happened thus: one day when Mother Theodore was very sick, Sister Saint Francis was confined to her bed by one of the headaches from which she used to suffer exceedingly two or three times a week. A simple partition separated her room from that of her dear superior, whose groaning she could hear. Being unable to care for her personally, Irma asked Our Lord to diminish her beloved superior's sufferings by increasing her own. Her prayer was granted, and for five hours a part of Mother Theodore's sufferings were added to those of Sister Saint Francis. Her pains became, indeed, so intense that, thinking she was going to die, she sent for Father

Corbe. "Father," she said when she became a little calm, "what God does He does well. Never again shall I ask for the sufferings of other people."

When Irma was disabled on account of sickness she suffered less from her physical pain than from her zeal, as is evident from one of her letters to Father Dupontavice,[1] the pastor at Madison, in which she says:

I hope your time is better employed than mine—that is, if there can be anything better than to do God's will by doing nothing. I can preach very well to Mother Theodore in order to console her when she is not able to attend to the community. I tell her that God has no need of strong horses to draw His carriage, and that He is satisfied with our good-will. Still, when it is my turn to remain in the stable, and I see around me so many uncultivated fields, so much virgin soil to be tilled, I acknowledge that it costs something to have poor health.

In the following letter she tells of the affectionate care she received when ill.

To Her Mother

I went to Vincennes in order to consult the physician, and returned quite recovered. But since then I have had another of my old attacks, with frequent fever and several fainting spells. For some days Mother Theodore was uneasy about me; but there is no probability of my dying, and I have not even thought of it. She absolutely forbids it, and extends her authority even over Our Lord, to whom, as soon as I am somewhat ill, she addresses *prayers* that are equivalent to *orders*. After all, as we have played the same trick on her and kept her by the same means, she is only avenging herself. I am now fully convalescent, and I eat until I am ashamed. I make all Sister Olympiade's dainties dis-

[1] Father Dupontavice made his studies at the seminary of Rennes with Irma's brother, Abbé le Fer de la Motte.

appear in an instant, at which she raises her astonished eyes to heaven. This dear Sister has true affection for me, and has given me proofs of it which I shall never forget. Indeed, my dearest mother, Our Lord's words are verified, that those who leave all for Him will receive a hundredfold even in this life. I had to be ill in order to appreciate the charity and tenderness of my Sisters; one arranged my coverings, another gave me a drink, a third brought me flowers from the garden. Pepa told me that at home she had been waited on like a queen; but I have been treated like the spoiled child of Our Lord, for I am so near the chapel that from my room I can hear the prayers of the Holy Mass. Mornings that I am able to receive Holy Communion, I have only a step to take, then I can quietly return and finish my thanksgiving in the chimney corner or in bed.

While I am writing to you, one of our Sisters is putting on my table a plate of nice little fritters; you see I have the fat of the land and the dew of heaven. But I hope that before dying I shall have some poverty to endure.

Our boarding-school is succeeding very well. On July thirty-first we had the commencement exercises under the forest trees. The pupils acted little plays, and several of them wore Breton costumes. Louison made a Cancalaise headdress, with which the Americans were delighted. The children were examined and acquitted themselves well. Then came the distribution of prizes, which Mother Theodore presented to the parents. I was pleased to see those men, apparently so cold, wipe their eyes as they kissed their daughters. When the crown for excellence of deportment was awarded to Mary G——, one of your little Catholic girls, her poor mother was almost choked with tears as she placed on her child's head the pretty crown which I myself had had the pleasure of making. After the ceremony the mother of the happy young girl said, "Mary, we shall keep the crown carefully, and on your wedding day I shall place it again on your head." "O mother! say rather the day of my reception of the Holy Habit," she

replied quickly. The dear child! She would indeed be happier to wear it for that ceremony than for any other.

The truth of Saint Theresa's words, "The barrier of inability is something painful for love," was fully experienced by the Sisters of Providence during the first six years spent on the missions. Despite their labors, their zeal, their fervent prayers, they did not meet with the success they had looked for in the conversion of their pupils, for up to this time not one had been received into the fold of the Church. Baptism had been administered to some little children and young girls belonging to parents who, although Catholic in name, had neglected to have them baptized; but the hopes of the Sisters regarding their non-Catholic students were not realized. Several of these, however, manifested an ardent desire to become Catholics, but until they were of age they could not be permitted to make their abjuration without the consent of their parents. Some earnestly, but vainly, solicited this permission; others, upon returning to their homes, gradually lost their good desires. "We are often disappointed in our pupils," Irma lamented; "with us they are all ardor, but once in the world, they are afraid. If you only knew what persecutions they suffer."

These disappointments were extremely painful to the burning zeal of Sister Saint Francis Xavier. To console her, Mother Theodore would say: "We are sowing the seed now, and perhaps it will remain buried for many years; but, even if the harvest be destined for other hands, we shall not have lost our time. If none of the young girls that we are bringing up become Catholics, at least their absurd ideas and erroneous opinions of the Catholic Church will be corrected, and, when they in their turn send their daughters to us, we may hope there

will not be the same opposition. God intends us to do good little by little and without noise. We must first root up prejudices before planting Catholic virtues."

Irma felt the truth of this reasoning, and she wrote to her family:

We have much consolation in the children of our classes; many of them have lost their prejudices, and in heart are attached to our holy religion. Too weak to declare themselves Catholics in their family circles, they sigh over their cowardice and repeat incessantly to the other pupils, "How happy are you to be born of Catholic parents!" One of them, however, wrote to us last week that she was soon going to receive permission to be baptized. It is our hope that future generations, at least, will taste the fruits of their mothers' convictions.

But hope alone could not satisfy the heart of Sister Saint Francis Xavier; great, accordingly, was her joy when she could finally announce to her family that Our Lord had granted them the favor of seeing at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods one abjuration, which was soon to be followed by many others. She gives an account of the touching ceremony in her next letter.

To Her Mother

July 25, 1846.

Now we can say our *Nunc dimittis* since, after six years in America, we have at last had the consolation of seeing one of our pupils receive baptism. God for a long time deferred granting us this favor, perhaps to make us appreciate it the more. You will think the happy one is Sarah or Lucy, who are both so well instructed and have so long desired this grace. But no; it is Marianne Duret, a young girl of fifteen, whose gayety and lively manners always made us think she would have neither the courage nor the perseverance necessary for this great action. Her father is an old

Frenchman from Canada, who was baptized but has never practiced any religion. Her mother is an American Protestant, and all the friends of Marianne are also non-Catholics.

Last Thursday, July twenty-third, at seven in the morning, she had the happiness of receiving holy baptism. Mother Theodore, who had the goodness to allow me to instruct her, also chose me for her godmother. I shall not tell you the emotions of my soul when, after I had answered for her and with her that she renounced all the pomps of the devil and believed in Jesus Christ, she was received into the Church. Fortunately, there was no occasion for me to speak at the moment when she was baptized; I was so choked with tears that I could not have uttered a word. Ah! there were many tears shed. I think Mother Theodore forgave us then for having prevented her going to heaven last winter. If only you had been present, my dearest mother, with my beloved father and all those who love our mission. You would have been so happy to witness the pure joy of your first little "granddaughter" of the forest. When the priest had placed on her head the white veil and crown of flowers, made by her godmother, she took her place among the First Communicants.

Our good Father Corbe gave them a very touching exhortation. All the Catholic children had gone to Confession the evening before, so that they might receive Holy Communion with their companions. Three of the little girls have non-Catholic mothers; only one had the happiness of having her mother kneel beside her; but God has chosen us to replace them in some respect with their children. Marianne, by her piety and joy, excited a holy jealousy in the hearts of the others. I offered to God, in the name of you all and of our dear community of Ruillé, this first conquest of the Sisters of Providence in America. After the Mass a fine breakfast awaited the children. The weather was beautiful, and the day ended with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Public prayers were offered for our dear benefactors.

You see, my mother, there are some true joys for the poor Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Thank God for us, because He has an infinite love for our dear mission, which He well knows is His own.

I have a big boy twenty years old whom I am preparing for his First Communion. They accuse me of partiality for my Lorenzo, and I do not attempt to justify myself entirely.

Some days after, she wrote again to her mother:

Aug. 7, 1846.

Yesterday our distribution of prizes took place; tomorrow our retreat will open, so it suffices to tell you that I have but one little moment to chat with you. Our children answered very well, and their parents are satisfied with their progress. A lawyer who resembles Monsieur Guilbourg presided at the commencement. Although a Protestant, he has shown much interest in our school.

Despite her crown, her reward of merit, and her gilded books for first prize in her class, our poor Lucy left Saint Mary-of-the-Woods with a very heavy heart. Since she asked permission to be baptized, her father is in a state of desperation. She trusts in God, however, and is determined to be a religious as soon as possible. She recommends herself to your prayers. Last evening she went into the chapel for the last time, and sobbed on leaving this dear refuge where she hopes to spend her life. In the city where her father resides there is no priest, no instruction, nothing to sustain her. Sarah, fortunately, lives not very far away, and they can confide to each other their hopes and their sorrows. Sarah is still awaiting the return of the priest, to be baptized. His absence has already lasted six months, and, if he defer his return much longer, she will ask permission to come here in September. Pray for them both and also for my goddaughter, Marianne, who has a very passionate disposition. She thanks father for his beautiful box and says she will keep it all her life.

There seems to be nothing which Satan leaves untried in order to avenge the tricks we play on him. He is furious against us. The other day the Presbyterians sold at a fair dolls dressed as Sisters of Providence. They made us with heads of monsters. . . . They still have their dolls, and the number of our pupils has increased.

CHAPTER VII

IRMA, MISTRESS OF NOVICES—SPIRITUAL COUNSELS AND TRAINING

IN 1848 Sister Saint Francis Xavier was officially elected Mistress of Novices. She had for several years previously fulfilled that charge, and, while Mother Theodore was in France, she had also been entrusted with the spiritual care of the entire community.

Next to the conversion of sinners nothing, certainly, was more attractive to Irma's activity and zeal than to lead souls to perfection and the love of Our Lord. Important as this office of Novice-Mistress was, Sister Saint Francis did not in any of her letters speak of her election; not until after a long time, when she knew that Mother Theodore had apprised her parents of it, did she refer to her dear novices,—those beloved children whom she cherished with the tenderness of a mother. After her death one of her novices wrote: "How many sorrow-stricken Sisters feel they have lost not a friend only, but a mother, a mother who never repelled them, one in whose bosom they could deposit their most secret thoughts and all the anxieties of their hearts. Her room like her heart was always open, always easy of access. We could present ourselves there at any hour of the day or night. Whether she was sick or well there was never any difference in her welcome. She received every one with such kindness depicted on her countenance that each one felt as if there were no other matter requiring her attention. Our sorrows were her sorrows, our joys her

joys; even on her deathbed, when all the Sisters were admitted to her room, being unable herself to speak to one of us whom she knew to be troubled, she begged Mother Theodore to hear and comfort her."

Another novice wrote: "Oh! how easy and sweet it was to live with her. Things painful to us she knew how to render light and agreeable. She carried our little burdens, or at least helped us to bear them when she could not relieve us entirely. If she perceived a cloud on the countenance of any one of us, she gave the troubled one a light touch on the shoulder as a sign to follow her into her dear little room. There she spoke in such a way that the wounds of the heart were soon healed.

"She seemed to know what passed in our souls, and often she told me things known only to God and myself. The week before her last illness I asked to make my monthly retreat, as I had been obliged to omit the exercise on the day appointed. In granting this permission, there was in her glance something that I cannot explain. The next day she said to me, 'I have allowed you to make your retreat to-day, because it is the last you will make with me.' She then spoke of several things which would happen to me after her death. All took place as she predicted."

From Sister Mary Ambrose's "Reminiscences" [1] we glean many delightful details. In her exquisite way she draws this fair picture:

"Holy, lovable, irresistibly so, Sister Saint Francis had been described to me—then a girl of eighteen—who had chosen the religious life, and was awaiting the day when I should see my longings satisfied in the blessed

[1] "Reminiscences," written by Sister Mary Ambrose in 1916.

retreat of the Novitiate. Many times had I painted imaginary portraits of my future Mistress. I had made her *spirituelle,* haloed with sanctity, charming, ideal, with beaming eyes and smile.

"It was the evening of October 22, 1850. The sun was declining that beautiful autumn day when I arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Peace, celestial peace, seemed to reign in this woodland retreat. My feet scarcely touched the earth as I eagerly hastened towards "Providence" where, awaiting me at the entrance, stood a Sister. No one need have told me her name. What a countenance was hers! At first there seemed to be no features, so luminous was the heavenly expression. The delicate nose, the exquisite lips and chin, the fine forehead, the clear, transparent complexion were illumined by large brown eyes, well set, and lighted with a heavenly sweetness surely God-given to draw souls to Himself.

"Alas, for my imaginary portrait! Vain attempt to picture her who clasped me to her heart in that first embrace of love. Holy? Yes, sanctity shone in her face, but it was a sanctity that made itself all things to all men to gain all to Christ. Fortunate I, to have found a friend for time and for eternity, to have had my lot in life cast with Sister Saint Francis Xavier.

"Soon I made the acquaintance of my favored Sister novices. Know that the golden age lives again in the Novitiate of every religious community. Moreover, ours was a Novitiate with a saintly Mistress. We breathed an atmosphere of holiness and happiness, and drank joy from an ever-flowing fountain. That we were human and young, Sister Saint Francis knew, and she was human and youthful with us, spiritualizing our lives and guarding us with the mercy and love of the

Divine Master while she entered into our recreations with the zest of a child. When her French accent worked merriment in the novices, she enjoyed their mirth. And when the mischievous Sister Seraphine, with the simplicity of a child would ask, 'Sister, what do you call that point on New Providence?' Sister Saint Francis, enjoying the fun, would answer, 'Ze theefle (steeple) you mean?' and then wait good humoredly till after some minutes, Sister Seraphine, wishing to have another laugh at 'Ze theefle,' would repeat her question.

"In our little circle were Germans, Irish, English, French, and Americans; but to Sister Saint Francis, with her love for America and France, we were all subjects of the heavenly kingdom, and she prudently avoided all allusions to nationalities.

"Our feast days were days of pure delight. Every recreation was a golden time, but a time we always employed usefully. Sister Saint Francis was ever our model for industry. At the noon recreation she painted in water colors, busily plying her brush as she amiably, even merrily, talked and laughed. In the evening she darned,—I shall not say how well, for alas! Sister was not nimble with the needle,—but faithful at least. If we loved our recreations for the merry times we had, we loved even more, for their spirit of divine unction, Sister Saint Francis' instructions. Her knowledge of the Scriptures, of Church History, and of the lives of the Saints was remarkable. She was particularly devout to Saint Francis Assisi and Saint Thomas Aquinas; the latter she frequently quoted during her instructions. Many were the impressive stories she used in order to illustrate her lessons. While speaking of true zeal for the glory of God, she related the story of a desolate

mother who mourned the wickedness of her son. When her neighbors tried to console her, by telling her there were many other mothers that had far more wicked sons than hers, the good mother found no consolation in her misery, but only sobbed in sorrow that God was offended: 'Oh, would to God, mine were the only one!'

"Charity was a favorite theme with Sister Saint Francis. She would have us overlook one another's faults, and to impress upon our minds this virtue of mercy, she related, in her inimitably interesting manner, the story of the King and his favorite courtier. After listening to the tale, which the bearers eagerly recounted of the courtier's misdeed, 'Go,' said the King, 'and bring me a full history of all the good my courtier has done, and compare with that this little fault.' Sister's sweetness in giving reproof was winsomeness itself. Ah! those who lived in her presence basked in the very sunshine of love and kindness.

"Again and again she urged us to lose no opportunity of gaining merit and of profiting by the inspirations of grace. 'One in a hundred,' she would say, 'has the inspiration to mortify the sight, and not look at something to gratify curiosity. This is a special grace given to you as favored children of God, for which you should be thankful, and to which you should be very faithful.'

"One of her chief delights was to instruct the little children of the village. Her tact in gaining them was a lesson to us all. Despite her broken English, she made herself well understood. She would first inquire about their pets—their dogs, and cats, and horses, and rabbits,—then when she had won the confidence of the poor neglected little ones, she turned their thoughts to her lesson in Christian Doctrine, and taught them about God, about our Blessed Savior and the mysteries of our

Holy Religion. Nothing was more beautiful to us than the visible growth of the souls of those little children under the benign influence of Divine Grace, like the unfolding of flowers in the sunlight.

"Sister's devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to the Saints, especially Saint Joseph, was inspiring. But how describe her tender, her intense love of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? During prayer she seemed rapt out of herself, unconscious of her surroundings; yet, there was nothing repellant about her seraphic piety. Of a piece with her union with God were her constant gentleness, her patience in trials, and her considerateness for others.

"One of the greatest pleasures of Sister Saint Francis was to know that her spiritual daughters were happy and united among themselves. She could not endure a sad look, a somber countenance, for she desired to see them gay and courageous. 'How glad I am that our Sisters of —— are so happy!' she one day remarked. 'They are always joyful and never discouraged by their privations and sacrifices. How much good this news does me! God so loves joyful hearts.'

"'You would love these dear children if you knew them,' she wrote, 'they are so good. But they need guidance. How pleased I should be to have some persons of solid piety to assist them! They lack the early education, that Christian education which we have received so liberally. I am surprised that they are what they are with so little religious instruction.'

"After sixty-six years there yet remains with me the impression that Sister Saint Francis' chief characteristic was the unconsciousness of her own holiness, a holiness that edified, but never rebuked us, never made us unnatural or uncomfortable. Fortunately for us young

Americans, God had sent us a saintly woman with a cosmopolitan spirit, a woman so unmeasured in His Divine love that she lived in its elements as a creature. All her actions seemed abreath with the Divine Spirit, so that she might have said 'I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me.' She was, indeed, an *Apostolic Woman.*" [1]

Irma, as we have seen, became a child again with her novices and postulants, many of whom were not older than the pupils. She knew how to divert and amuse them, and she told them the stories which had charmed her young brothers and sisters, though always she adapted her narrative to the religious life in order to benefit their souls.

To her sister Elvire she wrote:

We often have gay recreations. I am like an old cat playing with her kittens. Pepa predicted that to punish me for my dislike for dancing, God would send me, at fifty, a passion for this amusement. If she saw me at thirty-four playing *biribi* she would say, "Well! the first part of my prediction is accomplished." My dearest sisters, when there is singing to be done, how I miss you! Dear Elvire, when I think of *bad teachers* I put you first. My beautiful crêpe shawl from China, which I gave you all too soon, did not even touch your heart; but you were very young then. In heaven we shall sing together, and there we shall have no difficulty either in listening or singing; nothing will weary us, nothing displease us. Only a little while and that dear day will dawn for us.

Sister Saint Francis, we see, continued to regret having no voice. Only persons occupied with the young can understand how much singing contributes to enliven

[1] Reference is here made to the title of the book under which the life of Sister Saint Francis Xavier was first published in English.

their recreations, and how one is often inconvenienced when deprived of this powerful auxiliary. But if Sister Saint Francis could not learn the airs of songs, she could at least adapt words to music. Sometimes she took a song which had charmed her in her girlhood days and substituted divine for profane love. She also composed for the orphan asylum a hymn on the duties of children, which, through the kindness of Mrs. Sadlier, was printed in New York, and afterwards used in the schools.

It happened on one occasion that Sister Saint Francis would not refrain from making herself heard. Of the event one of her American novices wrote in very imperfect French: "Once, when we were very young, Sister Saint Francis wished us to sing in church on Sunday; but we, not knowing how very well, were not altogether prompt in obeying. She then stood near the one who sang best and began to sing with all the force she could command. Scarcely had she begun when we sang with all our might, so as to drown her false voice and prevent any one from hearing her. We found out afterward that this was exactly what she desired. As soon as we began she stopped."

Irma lost no opportunity of making her novices practice self-renunciation and detachment. If any one among them showed too much affection for an object, she was immediately deprived of it. Among the songs brought to the community, probably for the pupils, she noticed that one which began with the words,

> "Towards the shores of France
> Let us softly sail."

was sung with too much expression. Fearing it might reawaken in some of her Sisters a dangerous love of country, she put it out of sight without even speaking of it. Search was long made for it, but in vain.

"As soon as Sister Saint Francis observed that one of us was attached to her place in the dormitory, she had her bed carried to another place," said one of the novices. "Sometimes we were not eight days without being dislodged. In protest we pleaded a love of silence, which might be violated by these perpetual changes; but she did not allow herself to be deceived, and continued to exercise us in patience and renunciation."

To make virtue loved, Sister Saint Francis employed the most efficacious means, that of showing forth in herself an example of what she taught to others. Mother Theodore had told her to close the curtains when the sun came into her room, a counsel which the dear Sister sometimes forgot. One day when she was surrounded by several novices and postulants, the superior entered and, finding the window open, reproved her severely for it. She showed such gratitude and joy for the correction that the novices thought Mother Theodore had given this reproof to their Mistress in order to teach them how to receive correction.

"Never in any way did she wound charity," wrote one of the Sisters who had been of the number of her novices, "nor would she suffer it to be wounded in her presence. If an action appeared bad under ninety-nine aspects, she would see only the hundredth, if it were favorable. Those with whom she lived are witnesses that she had the rare talent of turning everything into good and of blinding herself to the bad."

If we recall how often Irma in her youth reproached herself for her raillery and her sharp witticisms, we shall realize that her unalterable charity was the fruit, not of nature, but of grace. Her kind indulgence, however, did not degenerate into weakness, for she never yielded in questions of duty.

When the novices she had formed to the religious life left the Mother House to go on the various missions, Sister Saint Francis did not lose sight of them. She interested herself in their labors, their successes, their trials; and as she could no longer encourage them by her words, she did so by her letters.

To One of Her Religious Sisters

The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence

"You will have much to suffer," said our Savior to His Apostles, "but have courage, I have overcome the world. . . . Yet a little while and I shall take you with Me, and your joy no one shall take from you." My dear Sister Maurice, remember these consoling words: "Yet a little while and I will take you with me." When Our Lord shall have taken you with Him, no one will trouble your joy; no more geography to prepare, no more weeks to watch over the children; you will be always free, always happy. Yet a little while and this beautiful day will come. But now is the hour of combat. When you awake in the morning, consider what crosses Our Lord is preparing for you, and say: "I thank you, my good Jesus, for having from all eternity prepared these little trials for your unworthy child, who deserves only the false praises and the fleeting pleasures of earth—I who am so worldly and so vain. O dear crosses! I kiss you all, little and great. What must I do to advance on my journey? How many miles shall I walk to-day towards heaven?" You think that you would arrive more quickly going on *foot* and running with all your might; but Our Lord has shut you up in the vessel of obedience, and, though you are thus carried more rapidly towards your heavenly home, you do not perceive it.

When the love of liberty assails you, think of Our Lord wrapped in swathing bands by the Blessed Virgin and laid in a manger. He could not even move His little arms. Think also of the chains with which He was

bound, and ask Him by this suffering He endured for you, to accept the sacrifice of your liberty. See Him nailed to the Cross; He could not even wipe away a single drop of blood that flowed into His sacred eyes. But what do I say, my dear Sister? I need not send you away to Jerusalem to find Jesus a prisoner. Look from the window of the room where you study, and you can see the prison of Jesus. How narrow the tabernacle is! He who could fly among the stars on the wings of the cherubim is enclosed in a little silver vase! His mortal career is ended; He could enjoy the privileges of glorified bodies, and for you He sacrifices them. Ask Him sometimes, who has made the greater sacrifice, He in the tabernacle or you in your employment?

If to be a prisoner for you is not enough, He will deliver Himself to you, and in Holy Communion will make Himself your captive. Will you still regret your liberty, your independence? I answer for you to Our Lord, "No, No." Oh! may you be until death a perfect victim of His will and of His love.

When God called some of the Sisters to Himself Irma, though rejoicing at their happiness, was deeply afflicted by their loss.

Oh! how happy we shall be in heaven [she wrote]. One of our beloved Sisters has just gone there. She had a heart of gold, or rather of wax, which melted at the least ray of celestial heat. Sister Marie Joseph did much good during her ten years of religious life, although she entered the community aged and delicate. She died so holily, so joyfully, that it would tempt the angels to wish to die. I felt her death as keenly as that of Sister Liguori, but the loss to the community is not so great, for Sister Liguori was young and strong. Sister Marie Joseph was much like Mother Theodore. I have had great difficulty in resigning myself to her death, and her place will long remain vacant.

During one of her journeys Mother Theodore, fearing

that Irma's zeal might go beyond her strength, wrote forbidding her to fatigue herself with one of the Sisters who was ill. The letter having reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods only after the Sister's death, Irma wrote immediately in reply:

My beloved Mother:—To-day at noon you learned of the death of our poor little Sister. I seem to hear you say, "Sister Saint Francis must have suffered very much during these last few days; she is not reasonable. Sister Josephine is a thousand times happier now than when she was on earth. Later in life she might perhaps have had many temptations, many trials." That is true, Mother, and if you could peep into my soul you would find that I am resigned, even grateful to God. I have thought more to-day of your sorrow than of my own, because it is very hard for you to learn through strangers of the death of your daughter, a daughter so innocent and so amiable. I have thanked God that your letter reached me only after the death of Sister Josephine, for perhaps, despite my resolution to submit, I might have interpreted obedience according to my personal ideas, and I have been able at least to thank Our Lord for delivering me from the occasion of offending Him. Oh! a single fault avoided is better even than the life of a cherished Sister.

Not only to the absent novices did Sister Saint Francis address her wise counsels; her solicitude followed the pupils of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, who, on their return to their homes, were exposed to many dangers. That the young girls thought they could count on the interest she took in them, this fragment of a letter makes evident: "We have had three baptisms," Irma says. "One of the converts, who is twenty-four years old, chose me for her godmother. I asked her the reason of her choice, not knowing any myself. 'When I shall need religious instruction,' she replied, 'I shall write to you,

and I am sure that my dear Sister Saint Francis will answer.' " The young lady's confidence was certainly not misplaced, as is seen from the letter that follows:

My dear Martha,[1] your letter is very nice and very affectionate; yet I find in it a slight deviation from truth. True, your expression, "I have no time," is often given and accepted in excuse, but you know that I expect more from you than from many others in the matter of true simplicity. If really you had no time to write, I should rejoice that all your hours were well employed—no time for reading novels, no time for vain conversation and dangerous pleasures. Oh! how pleased I should be if it were thus; but I fear you find time to wound your soul, for your last letter showed signs of suffering and weakness. You are right in saying it is difficult to practice virtue in the world, the spirit of which is so different from that of Jesus. To-morrow this divine Jesus will repeat to you by the mouth of His ministers, "Blessed are they that mourn," and the world says, "Blessed are they that enjoy themselves." Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor; blessed are they that suffer," etc., and the world, "Blessed are the rich; blessed are they that are esteemed and applauded."

Yes, it is difficult to be good in the world; but the recompense will be greater for the soul that serves God courageously amid trials. If Daniel had remained at Jerusalem, he would never have manifested so openly his love for the law of God as he did among the dangers of an idolatrous court. Lift up your depressed heart, my dear child; God is near to assist you. When the flames of worldly pleasures rise around your senses, even though they are as high as those of the furnace into which the three Israelites were thrown, if you pray to Our Lord with confidence, He will send His angels to protect you from their pernicious influence.

1 We learn from the diary of Mother Theodore that the young lady addressed was Miss Martha Brett. She entered the community soon after the death of Sister Saint Francis and was known in religion as Sister Mary Esther.—Ed.

It is very necessary for you to take each day a few minutes to read and reflect upon the truths of faith. I approve of your imposing on yourself at least three minutes of reflection; but I hope you have said, "It shall never be less, but sometimes more." Do not fear that by prolonging the time a little you will be unfaithful to your promise. You are young, my dear Martha, and the world has many attractions for you; be firm in the resolution to save your soul, whatever be the price. Here our Catholic pupils taste the sweetness of the Lord's yoke; but when they leave our peaceful forest the world offers them its pleasures and its charms. They would like to give themselves up to them, yet at the same time preserve that fervor and peace which accompany piety. That cannot be; a divided heart cannot be tranquil, and if God is not the principle of our joy, it will ever be mingled with sadness.

You were regretting the other day that you were not with your companions to hear my usual instruction; and see, without intending it I am giving you one. Yes, again and again I repeat to my young listeners: Happiness, even on earth, is found only in the faithful discharge of our duty and in accomplishing the holy will of God.

To one of her cousins she writes:

Perhaps, dear Cecile, you will receive this letter for your patronal feast which I hope may be auspicious and bright for you, likewise for my aunt and my sister. Well do I remember, dear cousin, how pleasantly we used to spend the eve of your feast day. Though all these innocent joys are now past for your Irma, God gives others sweeter still to Sister Saint Francis Xavier.

Do not think you had not spoken enough of me in your letter; it was much more interesting to hear about yourself. My dear child,—you see I still give you your old title,—God will take care of you if you abandon yourself entirely to Him. I say *entirely,* without wishing to keep for yourself His heavenly consolations, not

even His peace, if it is His will to take it away. This is easily said, I know. But to carry it into execution, we must go to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. He has never refused me anything. Tell Him that I sent you, and that I have promised you His assistance. Tell Him that you no longer wish to be concerned about yourself, that you renounce the desire to find peace, that you wish for Him and Him alone. Oh! how happy you then will be! Peace, trouble, will be equally welcome, since you will be content even to be miserable, if God wills it. Your soul will then repose in this thought: "You, my Jesus, are happy, You are eternally happy. Your soul is no longer, like that of Your poor child, subject to sadness and trouble. You experienced both when You were on earth; remember, it was through love for me." Then you will rejoice that He whom you love more than yourself is forever delivered from the anguish which overwhelms you. Yes, let your heart indulge this sweet thought, "God is happy!" and then endeavor to contribute to His glory by all the means in your power. You are too much afraid of losing peace and recollection. What have poor little creatures like us to lose? *He who has nothing can lose nothing.* I would wish for you more expansion of soul. Yet you must not imitate me, for I went too far; but with your disposition there is no danger. Think, then, more of hating your faults than of confessing them, and be sorry for having displeased God rather than because you have injured your soul.

Go to Jesus with confidence. He is so good and loves you so much. Speak of Him among yourselves, not out of vanity nor to display your virtue, but because He is infinitely lovable. If one of you were thinking of coming to Vincennes, she would like to talk about Vincennes. Well! you intend to go to heaven, and Jesus is the bishop of that diocese. Speak of it, therefore, to Him very often, for He alone knows the road that will lead you there.

CHAPTER VIII

WORKS OF CHARITY AND ZEAL

DESPITE Irma's poor health and her charge of the postulants and novices, she did not fail to exercise her zeal outside the house, as often as opportunity presented itself. When her health permitted, she made visits to the village to instruct and to comfort, sometimes to seek out negligent neighbors. When she was on one of these errands of charity, a young man hid from her in the garden, but a glance of his wife helped Irma to find him. Then she reproached him kindly: "Is my dear John afraid of me? How could he think of hiding and running away? Alas! has he, then, no good news for me?" And the culprit hung his head and twisted his hat in his hand, blushing and smiling at the same time because she had discovered him.

"To labor for the conversion of sinners is a work requiring perseverance and courage," she often said; "I have always had more devotion than talent for this beautiful work, but my failures have never disheartened me."

No doubt Sister Saint Francis sometimes saw that her most persuasive words were without effect, that her hopes were unfounded, that her pious plans were but illusions; yet she tells us she never became discouraged, for she knew that God holds all hearts in His hands and that all things are obtained by prayer. When sinners seemed unwilling to listen to her, she prayed and asked prayers; and frequently Our Lord granted her what she most desired in this world, the happiness of contributing

to the salvation of souls. Her next letter continues on this subject:

One of our pupils who cannot obtain the consent of her family to her receiving baptism, left a little note begging me to ask the prayers of Monsieur Dupont and the associates of the Nocturnal and Perpetual Adoration. Seven young persons here who have already solicited favors through their intercession have been heard. Please tell this to our dear friends. One asked the conversion of her brother, the editor of a newspaper. I have seen this man since and his conversation singularly edified me. He now wears the scapular, and he is the model of the city in which he resides. For twenty-five years he had not been to confession. A thousand thanks for your prayers.

Another asked for the conversion of her infidel father, and he died last year in the bosom of the Catholic Church. Pray, pray always. Prayer takes cities and conquers citadels held by the demon for many years. Many of our poor sinners are yet resisting, but perseverance in our prayers will save them.

In the village of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Irma knew a young girl who for several years had been desirous of embracing the religious life, but was not able to do so because of her mother's unwillingness to make the sacrifice. God wished this young heart and sent the girl a severe illness which endangered her life. Already she had lost her sight, and her speech partially, when her mother, imploring Our Lord not to take away her child, promised to allow her to follow her vocation if her life were spared. Her prayer was heard, and her daughter would in a few days have been well enough to enter the novitiate, when one of her sisters, who lived in the South, arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She had heard of the convalescent's pious design and

came in all haste to dissuade her from her purpose. Entirely taken up with the world and its pleasures, she left untried no means of drawing her sister into the path she herself followed. She pictured attractively the gayety and charm of social life and the pleasure her sister would find in the exciting events which made her own life so fascinating. She tempted her with lovely jewels and beautiful clothes, and finally succeeded in shaking her resolution. She was, moreover, determined that as soon as her sister's strength permitted, she would take her back to the South to share in her own worldly life.

The Sister of Providence who was attending the sick girl related what then occurred: "On learning of the dispositions of this young girl, in whom she was deeply interested, Sister Saint Francis hastily took her shawl and wooden shoes, and, though her delicate health scarcely permitted her to leave her room, she started off with a speed I had not believed her capable of, telling me to follow her. She walked so rapidly that I could hardly keep pace with her. The weather was very cold, the roads uneven and frozen, and Sister Saint Francis lost one of her *sabots,* without seeming to be conscious of it. I picked it up and wished her to put it on, but she was not willing to pause even for a moment. 'What matter?' she said. 'Let us hasten. On the brink of a precipice there is a soul for whom Our Lord has shed His precious blood, and we must save this soul.' She had a long conversation with the sick girl, and made her see the dangers to which she would expose herself by imitating her sister's worldly life. From that moment the girl thought only of consecrating herself entirely to God, and the next day she was brought in a carriage to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She died two years after her religious profession."[1]

[1] Sister Clementine Monaghan.

While Irma was replacing for a short time a sick Sister in Vincennes, duty called her one day to that part of the city named by the Creoles "French Town." On hearing that there were many sick in the neighborhood she visited them, meeting among others a young girl, eighteen years old, a victim of consumption, who, unaware of the gravity of her affliction, was living in culpable neglect of her religious duties. Irma spoke to her so impressively of the happiness of suffering for God and of the great merit she could acquire if she were in a state of grace, that the sweet and affectionate words touched the heart of this poor child. She went to confession the next day, and a few days later ended her life by a holy death.

There lived near Saint Mary-of-the-Woods an old Lutheran lady who had great veneration for Sister Saint Francis, and at the same time such great confidence in her that she made known to her not only her good actions, but also her faults. One day she confessed to Sister that, having noticed that the turkeys belonging to the community had gone astray, she had driven them into her own yard, and had cooked and eaten them one after another; as she did this to prevent any one from stealing them and as she had acknowledged it, she could not be made to understand that it was theft. For a long time Irma instructed her in the doctrines of the Catholic religion and urged her to receive baptism; but all in vain. At last, however, her prayers were rewarded; the old lady made her abjuration, received the sacraments with much faith, and died blessing the one to whom, after God, she owed this happiness. When Sister Saint Francis was teased about her proselyte, she sought to make allowances on the ground of ignorance, but acknowledged that the old lady had gained heaven

very cheap; "and," she added, "she has even taken our turkeys with her to paradise."

Irma rejoices over another conquest: "I have just had the sweet consolation [she says] of appreciating the power of the Blessed Virgin in obtaining the grace of conversion. A person who had lived from childhood in a state of mortal sin, was yet accustomed to recite the rosary every Saturday in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and wore the miraculous medal. Animated by sentiments of faith and confidence, she at last received the scapular. O goodness of Mary for poor sinners! Three days afterwards this soul, so long unfaithful, was vanquished by grace and is now filled with gratitude and fervor. The missionary who heard her general confession is persuaded that she owes her salvation to the practice of reciting the rosary."

Sister Saint Francis, entreated on all sides for prayers, forgot occasionally to make special mention to God of the sinners recommended to her. A priest at Terre Haute often came to ask her prayers for the salvation of certain hardened sinners of his congregation. "I have many old serpents under the rocks," he would say to her; "recite the *thousand Aves* for them, that God may touch their hearts, for I can do nothing more." She promised to pray and ask others to pray, but sometimes she forgot. Nevertheless, the good priest would return shortly after to thank her and to rejoice with her at the conversions she had obtained. With much confusion and humility she acknowledged that she had forgotten her promise and refused the thanks she had not merited. Our Lord had acted towards her as He had toward St. Gertrude, to whom He granted all the graces she had the *intention* of asking.

Though Irma devoted herself especially to the

spiritual works of mercy, she did not neglect any of the temporal services in her power, as she considered these a means of drawing to God persons in whom she was interested. One day she heard that a sick person living far from the village was in need of assistance. Unable to find a driver for the community carriage, she took a Sister with her and undertook to drive the horse herself, or rather, she trusted to his instinct and let him go where he would. The road was bad; they passed over trunks of trees, and got out of one rut only to get into another. Near the house of the sick person the reins fell from Irma's hands and became so twisted about the horse's feet, that he was on the point of falling down in a marsh through which they were passing. Irma's companion was not more expert than herself, and both began to scream and to pray for help from God and man. Fortunately, Mr. Roquet, the sick woman's husband, heard their cries, and with the assistance of a neighbor, succeeded in rescuing them. Irma accomplished her charitable mission, and remembered her fright only to laugh over it with her companions.

The following incident shows that seeming impossibilities did not hinder her. She had no knowledge whatever of medicine. One day when the Sister-infirmarian was absent, a poor woman came to get a remedy for her husband who was suffering from fever. Being asked by the Sisters whether they should send the woman away, Sister Saint Francis replied, "No, no, not at all; she would be displeased. I shall prepare a potion for her"; and taking two pieces of loaf sugar and an equal amount of gum arabic, "Dissolve this," she said, "in a pint of fresh water, and give your husband half a glassful morning and evening. This will do him good." The woman went off delighted. A few days later she

returned asking work for her husband, whose fever had been checked and health restored by the prescription of Sister Saint Francis.

It will probably be remembered that in France Irma had a partiality for taking care of little boys. She had not lost this attraction in America, and her greatest happiness was to be with them.

Our dear superior is at Vincennes to open an orphan asylum for boys[1] [Irma wrote in 1851]. As one of the dreams of my youth was to care for little orphan boys, Mother Theodore supposes it will be very difficult to keep me at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, especially if the bishop carries out a project which to me is still sweeter, namely, that of entrusting to us the instruction of the little negroes. Mother declares they will have to build a railroad between here and Vincennes, so that I may visit them often. It is a great pity to have such a weakness at my age.

Her next letter says:

Our little boys, forty in number, are doing nicely. They pray for you with great fervor. I do not know when we shall begin our school for the negroes, for I find very few who wish to help us. The poor negroes are not in high esteem in this country. Still, two of our postulants have offered themselves for the work, and we shall take Father Peter Claver for our patron.

After a few more months Sister could write:

At last my desires are about to be realized. Bishop de Saint Palais is to begin a class for the negroes and to build a church for them. Dr. Batty, a French physician, will give part of the necessary funds. A priest from the diocese of Saint Brieuc will be their chaplain.

[1] This was the first of the kind in Indiana. The cholera in 1849 had taken away so many parents that the little children had to be cared for by the diocese.

Our Sisters will have charge of the school, and soon, I hope, these poor negroes will become Catholics.

Of the two houses conducted by the Sisters in Vincennes, Irma during the months she spent there chose the Orphanage for her place of residence. It was so poor that the Sisters were often in want of the necessaries of life, which fact of itself would lead Irma to give it her preference; but, in addition, she could have the advantage here of being with her dear little boys. They would all crowd around her, each one eager to let her see how well he knew his catechism, or his prayers. It was her custom to ask these poor children what they knew of their former life; her tender interest in their recital made it a pleasure for them to tell her the story of their earlier years. And they did not forget her after her departure; they spoke frequently of her and expressed their desire to see her again.

As the Cathedral was a considerable distance from the asylum, a resident of Vincennes sent his carriage to take Irma to make a visit there. One of the Sisters accompanied her, but there was still a vacant seat in the carriage. Irma called a poor little hunchback who walked with so much difficulty and pain that he could never go with the other children to church or on their excursions. She had him sit near her, took him to visit the church, made him say his prayers there, and explained the pictures to him; then she had him taken back to the asylum in the carriage, while she returned on foot. The little cripple, happy and proud, laughed at the jealousy of his companions, who called him *the gentleman.* The Sisters also jested with Sister Saint Francis on the object of her choice, expressing their regret at not having a hump in order to win her preference.

At Saint Mary-of-the-Woods whenever the boys who

lived in the neighborhood moved away from the village, they never failed to pay Sister Saint Francis a farewell visit. She always found time to see them, and besides good advice, she gave them books, medals, etc.

Once when she was confined to bed by one of her severe headaches, a family who were leaving for California came to say good-by. The Sisters did not dare dismiss them without informing Sister Saint Francis. She raised her head and rubbed her eyes to try to keep them open. "Oh! yes," she said, "my Lorenzo, my Lucy; I must see them. I must speak to them and see whether they have been to confession. Give me some pictures and medals." She apparently forgot her sufferings while occupied with the interests of these poor people. This family was shipwrecked on the way to California, and it was believed that all had perished. Six years afterward, however, a letter came to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from Lorenzo, who wrote to inquire about his old instructress. Mother Theodore used to say, smiling, "To know when Sister Saint Francis should be prepared for the last sacraments I need only say to her, 'There is a boy downstairs who wishes to speak to you.' Should she not reply, 'Let him come up,' I shall have no doubt that she is at the last extremity, and that we must send for the priest at once."[1]

A day came, however, when Sister Saint Francis had to relinquish this attraction for her brothers of all nations, in order to follow an interior conviction in favor of her own sex. This was when Father Dupontavice

[1] Many years after Irma's death Elvire, who had joined her sister at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, wrote: "One day I was surprised to see a young man of about thirty, pause and look at me intently without, however, addressing me—conduct not at all according to American usage. I learned afterwards that he was the little Simeon of whom Irma spoke in one of her letters. He had perceived in me some resemblance to his former teacher, and he would not go on his way without looking a few seconds and finding out who I might be."

applied to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods for religious to take charge of his boys' school. He wrote to Sister Saint Francis: "I have often spoken to our bishop of a dream which I beg God to bring to realization; it is that our boys and girls of Madison may be under the care of the Sisters of Providence. If I can see this before I die, I shall be happy and depart in peace, hoping for the fidelity of future generations in our dear Indiana."

"Our letters have crossed each other," he wrote again shortly after. "Did I tell you that I have at last gained the victory, and that Mother Theodore has promised me Sisters of Providence for my boys' school? The Blessed Virgin has obtained this favor for me. I shall, in a few years, have little *gentlemen* as pious as my little *ladies*. Pray, then, and ask prayers, so that I can procure money to establish permanently the schools for my children; that not only mine, but all in our diocese, may be conducted in the paths of religion and piety by the Sisters of Providence. You should have heard my eloquence in pleading the cause of my boys. Sister Mary Joseph *wondered* at me, the bishop laughed, and Mother Theodore surrendered."

In supposing that Mother Theodore had yielded to his earnest and pressing solicitations, Father Dupontavice had interpreted according to his own desires, Mother's answer regarding his future schools. In reality she had only promised to consult the Sisters and to take their advice on a point which was contrary to the Rule—that the Sisters of Providence should take charge of schools for girls only, unless in case of absolute necessity. It fell to Irma to apprise the pastor of Madison of the decision of the Sisters. Her letter said:

You are well enough acquainted with our Mother to

know that her zeal does not recoil before any personal sacrifice, and that her desires are in advance of her actions when there is question of obliging any one. When she commissions me to say that it is impossible for her to accept your boys' school, be assured that it costs her very much thus to destroy your pious and cherished hopes. You know Mother promised to speak to the Sisters about your request. Everywhere she went they showed the most positive reluctance to the community's taking charge of a school of this kind, since it is not according to our custom, and since there are still so many places in Indiana where the little girls have not yet the advantages of a Sisters' school.

Mother returned from Fort Wayne in a very suffering condition, but I believe that her illness is less painful than having to announce to you a determination which will grieve you, and to respond by a refusal to your confidence which is very precious to us. For myself, I could to-day say with a certain Roman emperor: "Would I had never learned to write." I must acknowledge that my heart wept when my conscience made me say: "My conviction is that we should not accept the boys"—I who so much love these poor children. We can at least make a novena to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, so tender and inventive, that they may procure for the boys a Christian education.

To this letter, which did indeed make impossible one of his most cherished projects, Father Dupontavice replied: "What! my desires, my hopes of seven years, which I thought crowned with success, are they now frustrated? I am not ashamed to acknowledge it, my eyes are wet with tears. The house was prepared near that of your Sisters.[1] Yesterday I was happy. . . . Oh! yes, beg the inventive Heart of Jesus to send me other daughters of His holy Church to tend these young plants so precious in His sight."

[1] The Sisters of Providence had a school at Madison, Indiana, for girls only.

This chapter may be fittingly brought to a close by the only letter we find written to any of her brothers after she came to America. That she wrote to them is beyond doubt. So great an event as the ordination to the priesthood of her brother Alphonse would not have passed without her congratulations. Moreover, in her other correspondence she mentions hearing from Charles, receiving a letter from Paul, or she thanks Louis for his little note. The letter we now introduce is to her brother Eugene and evidently belongs to her later years.

It is a long time, dear Eugene, since I have given myself the pleasure of a little chat with you. Of course I receive news of you, now from one, now from another. All agree that you are a good boy. I assure you that it gives me great joy to know that my dear brother has not abandoned the way pointed out to him from his childhood. I pray for you always. It is not difficult to be good towards one's own family, especially a family like ours, but it is much more so to be good in the depths of the heart, good towards all men and towards God. My dear child, I rejoice that you are home, since you are in a position to profit by the consolations of the family. Perhaps you sometimes think of me when you cross the Joinville bridge and that magnificent quay of which Monsieur Lorette sent me a drawing. Pray give me some of your rainy day trips. Do you remember our old spiritual profits when you used to come with me to my drawing lessons in warm weather? I can offer a few good "roastings" here for your intention, for if the cold is excessive, the heat is equally so. But all this will quickly pass away, and when we have reached heaven we shall repose together. How glad I shall be to see you all again! Poor Paul is more exposed than you, but the Blessed Virgin will take care of him. My dear Clementine is in distress; tell her I embrace her tenderly. I feel that I shall always have a weakness

for my three children; [1] when I think of you my eyes fill with tears and I am obliged to raise them to heaven for comfort. In that happy land we shall smile together over our tears, and after three or four million years we shall ask each other if it was worth while to be sad at being separated for a few hours of travel.

[1] Irma calls Clementine, Eugene, and Paul her "three children" because she had entire care of them and their studies until they were old enough for college.

CHAPTER IX

DAYS OF TRIAL

WHEN God wishes to try souls, He makes crosses of all things, and often the staff which should support our weakness causes us cruel anguish by breaking in our hands.

The years from 1843 to 1847 were years of intense suffering for the Sisters of Providence in America. The congregation was threatened both in its religious and in its temporal existence. Often the Sisters did not know whether in another month they would still be at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, or whether they must be exiled anew by leaving this second home to seek an asylum in other dioceses of the United States where they were invited and desired. In these grave circumstances, Sister Saint Francis displayed a firmness of character which seldom showed itself in the ordinary course of her life, so easily did she yield to the wishes of others. She struggled for God, for her dear superior, for her beautiful vocation; and, notwithstanding her love for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, never would she have purchased the happiness of remaining there at the price of an act of weakness. Referring to this time, the most intimate confidante of her soul wrote, "How describe her heroic devotedness to her superior and to the community? How tell the moments of anguish, a thousand times repeated, the fears, the agony of heart during those times of trial? God alone saw and understood her love, her devotedness, and the merit of those years." [1]

[1] See "Life and Life-Work of Mother Theodore Guérin."

Although Mother Theodore's letter of commission had named her Superior General of the Sisters of Providence in America, Bishop de la Hailandière withheld that title from her on the ground that as long as Saint Mary-of-the-Woods was not independent of Ruillé her office was merely that of a local superior subject to recall at any time by the authorities in France; and he did not permit her to wear the special pectoral cross that had been given her. The bishop also wished his community to be completely diocesan with radical changes in the rule. The Sisters held to union with their Mother House, for it was explicitly stated that no separation was to take place. They held also to the observance of their rule, modified, certainly, as conditions in the New World required. Difficulties multiplied. The situation becoming acute, Mother Theodore returned to France, ostensibly to solicit aid for her poor mission, but more particularly to confer with her superiors and the Bishop of Le Mans.

The following letters, not included in the former edition of the "Life of Sister Saint Francis," belong to this period.

To Mother Theodore in France

[Aug. 16, 1843.]

I give you a hundred thousand guesses at what we did yesterday—feast of the Assumption—from two to three o'clock. The Sunday preceding we finished our retreat. Sister Agnes and Sister Mary had the happiness to take their vows; hence, we are now six professed Sisters. Monseigneur called us all to your room yesterday and then told us that we were brought together to elect a Superior General, because your term had expired. I shall say nothing of the general consternation; some were pale, trembling; others were praying. Twenty minutes later, of the six votes cast, five billets had "Sis-

ter Theodore," the sixth had "Ma Mère"; which shows that your election was unanimous.

Later, when writing up the annals, Sister Saint Francis said: "If our Mother were only a local superior, her appointment would have to come from Ruillé, and the position could be held for any length of time. Why, then, should an election be demanded? If she was our legitimate Superior General, why deny her the title, and the cross worn by the Superior?"

After Mother Theodore returned to France, the bishop took matters into his own hands at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. On the question of the superiorship, his ideas were now from an exactly opposite view-point:—Mother Theodore had been given irrevocably to the Indiana foundation, Ruillé had nothing more to say; her three years' term of office had expired, there must now be an election, even though she was absent and knew nothing of the proceeding.

Other events of still graver import taking place, Mother Mary despatched a note to Mother Theodore, who was then at Paris, saying: "Fly home, my Theodore, to mend the broken platters; all the gold in France could not repay you for the harm your community may suffer from your absence."

The following letter is addressed to Mother Theodore, then ill in New Orleans.

[Feb., 1844.]

Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary!

My good and beloved Mother, what shall I say? Nothing, except that the time has come when we shall be happy if we love to suffer. I shall not enter into details. I dare not write anything, I would almost say I dare not even think anything now, for I do not know whether my views are false or not. I think that I may

say this much, however: Do not come to any conclusion before you have seen us. There are many things to be judged of only after hearing them. How I would wish to add to my pains those that you have to bear! I cannot resign myself to your multitude of contradictions; for my own I have more courage. It is unnecessary, I know, for me to repeat my ideas about Ruillé; they are just as they were when you left us; my opinion has not changed in your absence. I console myself that you have a support in the decisions that you have received. My poor Mother, how I pray for you! I dare not wish for anything for fear of following my own lights. I leave to God the fate of our beloved Congregation.

And again a few weeks later:

[March, 1844.]

Under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

My Mother, my poor Mother, you will be at Vincennes when you receive these few lines. I place your hand on my heart to prevent its running away to you. How much good your letter from Ruillé did me! I was so anxious about your sufferings. But God has shown you the value of sufferings; you found them in France; they await you in America; and I myself may be, by my imprudence, my indiscreet zeal, the cause of many of your trials. I shall explain my conduct later. I have a notebook of my proceedings, that I have kept to show you. I have copies of all the letters I have written during your absence, in order that you may pass judgment on them. My dear Mother, God is treating me as His true daughter. Humanly speaking, I am overwhelmed; yet I am happy and courageous. If I am at all wanting in courage, it is due to the thought that my conduct may have augmented your crosses. O Mother, if such be the case, pardon me.

I have tried to rise at five o'clock and my health does not suffer from it. God has blessed my efforts. One more hour to love this good Jesus, to suffer for Him!

Exteriorly it seems to me our community is very regular, but God alone knows whether it is or not. If He be satisfied with us, we, too, shall be content, shall we not, dear Mother? All for Him; nothing for any one else.

Good-by for a little while, dearest Mother. All your daughters love you and await your coming; but, I repeat it, no one is more devoted than your daughter Sister Saint Francis Xavier (if it be not poor Sister Olympiade; as to her, I dare not place myself above but beside her).

Sister Saint Francis had previously written:

My poor Mother, you have suffered so much for us that I should be happy to give you a minute for affection. But your excellent letter of October 6 reveals to me your crucified heart and your joy that it is so.

From Mother Mary, the Superior General in France

Ruillé-sur-Loir, July 8, 1847.

Dear and ever-beloved Sister Saint Francis Xavier,

We have shared the profound sorrow which the premature death of our very dear Sister Liguori has caused you. Her loss is the more to be deplored as you relied on her to be your mariner's compass, after your present guide would be wrecked by the waves and tempest of all kinds of tribulations.

This double misfortune has just happened to you, as is stated in the letter you wrote to Monseigneur Bouvier, which he has communicated to us, and in which you announce to him, not only the deposition of Mother Theodore, and her unmerited expulsion from the Society which she has founded—with the help of the good God—but even her being sent away from the Diocese of Vincennes.

All this is very hard to digest and very difficult to

conceive. But, in brief, God has permitted it to try your faith and your confidence in His divine Providence. This painful trial is the last by which He wishes you to show your love and obedience. He tries you as He did Abraham. He will console you, as He did that holy Patriarch in restoring to him his son, by the ministry of an angel. He will restore to you your Mother also (if she is not already given back to you) by the means of a saint, named by our Holy Father to replace your bishop. Thus you see that, at the moment you believed all lost, God in His divine decrees was occupied in your deliverance. That God of all goodness and mercy witnessed your sorrows and heard your prayers; He now sends you one of His angels to convey to you a treaty of peace, because He is pleased with your sacrifices and your patience. But do not glory in this, my dear daughter; on the contrary, be more humble and more obedient; for if the wind of pride shatters the cedars and the strong oak trees in your forests of Indiana, what should you not fear, you, weak reeds! Remain, then, in humility, and when your new prelate shall think fit to ask of you an account of the line of conduct you had with his predecessor, explain yourselves with great simplicity and sincerity, without showing either resentment or bitterness of heart against the one who put on you such heavy crosses—by Divine permission, because men are but instruments and secondary causes in all that happens to us, good or bad. Consequently, give to your new bishop unequivocal proofs that you are the disciples of a crucified God, and that, following His example, you know how to forgive from your heart your enemies, your persecutors, and even your executioners, if necessary. Monseigneur, our bishop, has written to us from Paris, where he is now, that he has heard from a good source that the resignation of Bishop de la Hailandière has been accepted by our Holy Father; that a most worthy new bishop has been nominated for the Bishopric of Vincennes; and that the person commissioned to deliver the Papal Bulls embarked at Havre, June fifteenth. His Lordship in

his letter asks me to write to you immediately and engage you to persevere in your patience, which means to say that he desires that you remain at your post, notwithstanding the anathema hurled at you by Bishop de la Hailandière, which, after all, cannot last long. By doing so, you will add to your crown, bearing on your head, and not in your soul, the weight of an unjust excommunication.

Let Mother Theodore, then, remain in Indiana, and if by some necessity she is obliged to quit your house for some days, let her not go far from her little flock. She will govern it later with peace and in security, for I think the new bishop will do her justice.

I do not write to Mother Theodore to-day. I will not do so until I hear something positive about your situation, which cannot remain long without being decided one way or another. The event of the change of bishop at Vincennes, together with the crosses you have had in that country, make me confident that God will bless your mission. So, now, be full of courage, patience, and hope, since to you also it has been given to know how much we must suffer for the glory of the Holy Name of Jesus our Savior. We will await a letter from you with impatience, in order to know the issue of your momentous affairs.

During this period, painful in the extreme for the community, the Sisters had the consolation of seeing Catholicity spreading daily throughout the United States. Although individual acts of fanaticism and persecution were not uncommon, the government granted to Catholics a liberty too often refused them in some European countries nominally subject to the Holy See. The bishops and archbishops profited by this tolerance to assemble in synods or national councils for the purpose of treating of the vital interests of religion.

At the Sixth Council of Baltimore, 1846, Bishop de la Hailandière laid before the bishops his desire to leave

the diocese of Vincennes and return to France, for the rest which both his physical and mental condition required. His resignation was accepted at Rome; and on the 25th of May, 1847, news reached Vincennes that Monseigneur Bazin had been named his successor. The new bishop, a native of Lyons, France, had for the past thirty-five years lived at Mobile with Bishop Portier, who consented very reluctantly to be separated from his vicar-general. "I know nothing particular in regard to him," Irma wrote, "but, since God has chosen him, we must hope he will do much good for our poor Indiana." After Bishop Bazin's arrival at Vincennes, her letter says: "At last God has sent us a new bishop. Monseigneur Bazin arrived on the 14th, and the day after tomorrow he will be consecrated. We saw him for a few hours. He received us very kindly and appeared grateful for our little visit, as we were the first to call on him. The next day he came alone to our house, asked for the pupils, and after speaking kindly to them and bestowing his blessing, gave them a holiday. He seems an excellent person, and is frank, simple, and lively, with manners much like those of the beloved Bishop Bruté. His white hair makes me think of Pepa's love for old priests. Oh! this one would indeed please not only her but all of you."

The new bishop received the episcopal consecration on the 24th of October, 1847, from the hands of Bishop Portier, assisted by Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati and Bishop de la Hailandière. The words he addressed to his new diocesans were often interrupted by tears. He said it was for them that he had left his dear diocese of Mobile, and his beloved bishop whom he cherished as a father. "Yes, my dear children," he continued, "if you are sick or afflicted, come for me night or day and have

no fear that you will annoy me. Consider me now as belonging entirely to you, since I was consecrated this morning for your happiness. My hair is white, but I am still vigorous and strong, and I shall love you as I loved my children of Mobile." These simple words deeply touched the hearts of the people of Vincennes, and from this first day they gave their bishop their loyalty and sincere affection.

Monseigneur de la Hailandière had intended to place Father Corbe, the reverend superior of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, at the head of the seminary at Vincennes; but Father Corbe had declined the dignity, and Bishop Bazin, knowing how much it would afflict the community to take away its good superior, selected Father de Saint Palais, the pastor at Madison. On the day following the consecration of the new bishop, Father de Saint Palais arrived at the episcopal residence intending also to decline the honor proffered him. On entering Bishop Bazin's room he found him on his knees, bathed in tears, offering to God the sacrifice he had just made in parting forever from Bishop Portier. As soon as Monseigneur Bazin saw Father de Saint Palais, he threw himself into his arms, begging him to be his friend, and to aid him in carrying the heavy cross the Lord had imposed on him. "I have just left my father, my best friend," the bishop said; "will you not remain with me?" Father de Saint Palais could not resist such pleading, and his intended refusal was changed into a promise to remain at Vincennes.

In January, 1848, Bishop Bazin visited Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

He was among us [writes Sister Saint Francis] as a father among his children. He gave us several conferences, visited our pupils, and showed the greatest

concern for the health of our Mother, who was ill at the time. He revised with her those points of our Constitutions and Rules which could be observed in America only with difficulty. He was deeply grieved to see the distance that separates our houses, and how far we are from the church. On his return to Vincennes he wrote to all the Sisters on the missions. The letters which he addressed to Mobile, to the Propagation of the Faith, and to Rome were filled with the joy that his visit to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had afforded him. He promised to return in August to give our retreat, and to see the reunion of all his beloved daughters, in whom he placed his dearest hopes.

Bishop Bazin, assisted by Father de Saint Palais and Father Chassé, preached the Lent of 1848 at Vincennes. Many sinners, touched by the goodness of their bishop, came to him, and, by a good confession, prepared themselves for their Paschal Communion. In the midst of these labors he was attacked by a cold, which soon developed into inflammation of the lungs. On Saturday, the eve of Palm Sunday, notwithstanding his sufferings, he heard confessions most of the day; but the following morning he was obliged to return to bed, and his illness soon became alarming. Mother Theodore, who was then in Vincennes, realized more than Monseigneur Bazin the danger of his condition; she hastened to express her anxiety to her daughters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. "Our bishop is hourly growing worse, [she said]; I have just spent a few minutes with him. He spoke of you all; he is deeply interested in our community. He remarked that the physician still hopes to save him; but I have no more hope. He prays unceasingly, and when I see how pious and edifying he is, I cannot but think our good bishop ripe for heaven."

Yes, God willed to call to Himself this holy prelate, whom the diocese of Vincennes had time to know and to

love, only to regret the more. Till the last moment of his life, he continued to manifest his interest in the community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. With a trembling hand he signed the deed which gave the Sisters possession of the property promised them by Bishop de la Hailandière. Five minutes before he expired, he called for Mother Theodore and, raising his hand already cold with death, gave her his last blessing.

The holy bishop had begun to hear the confessions of men who for twenty or thirty years and more had remained away from the sacraments, and he regretted leaving incomplete the work of their conversion.

"Ah! my poor sinners," said he; "if I could only live long enough to hear their confessions and to reconcile them with God." Scarcely had he uttered the words than he reproached himself for this fervent desire, and when two of the priests entered his room a short time after, he said: "My brothers, kneel down and ask God to pardon the fault I have just committed. I have yielded to a temptation; I have desired to live." He was consumed by a burning fever, but he refused a proffered drink with the words, "No; since my tongue has murmured against the orders of Providence, it is just that it should be punished." He endured this privation till the end of his life, thus expiating what he considered a want of submission to the will of God.

On Easter Sunday, 1848, God called to Himself this holy bishop, who within a few months had effected immense good in the diocese of Vincennes. The people mourned for him as if they had known him many long years, and Protestants as well as Catholics assisted at the funeral, which was presided over by Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis, and Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati.

Bishop Bazin, who had appointed Father de Saint

Palais superior of the seminary, named him also administrator of the diocese, and several of the priests profited by the presence of the Archbishop of St. Louis to express the desire that the choice of the dying prelate might be confirmed at Rome. Archbishop Kenrick was pleased with their request, and promised to use his influence with the Holy See. His Holiness Pius IX yielded to their entreaty and named Father de Saint Palais for the see of Vincennes. Bishop de Saint Palais was consecrated on the 14th of January, 1849, and the community of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods had the consolation of finding in the new bishop a friend and father.

After Bishop Bazin's death, Sister Saint Francis wrote to her mother:

June 12, 1848.

God has again afflicted us profoundly in calling to Himself our good, holy and kind Bishop Bazin. He gave him to us, He has taken him away. Blessed be His Holy Name! I acknowledge that I felt this blow keenly. I wept over his death with bitter tears, for I mourned for our community, the diocese, and all the Catholics of Indiana, who, like ourselves, have lost a father. I do not remember to have known so charitable and affectionate a heart. When I told him of our troubles, he wept like a child; he loved us as he knew how to love. On the day of his death Vincennes was a city of mourning. Protestants and Catholics alike were in tears, and the marks of veneration accompanying his funeral were so universal as to make it undoubted that all thought him to be in heaven.

CHAPTER X

IRMA'S ILLNESS—HER CURE THROUGH OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE

SHORTLY after the death of Bishop Bazin, Sister Saint Francis was carried to the gates of death by a serious illness. When sufficiently convalescent she gave the details of her malady and of her happy recovery.

Our Lord appeared first to His Blessed Mother after His Resurrection and, following His example, I wish my cherished mother to be the first to whom I say, "Alleluia!" Oh! this "Alleluia" will find an echo in more than one heart, for I know the piety and gratitude of all my family, especially when the Blessed Virgin is the instrument chosen by God for the bestowal of His gifts. It is to this kind and most holy Virgin that you owe to-day the consolation of again seeing your daughter's writing.

After speaking of the beginning of her illness (inflammation of the lungs), she continued:

Friday night was terrible; my oppression increased and I became delirious from fever. When it diminished somewhat I realized my condition. I could neither cough nor expectorate, and I saw plainly that within a few hours my strength would be exhausted. I called to my aid my faithful friends, Jesus and Mary, and my good father Saint Joseph. Ah! how sweet it is to belong to them, and how small appears everything that we may have done for them. Hope was my confidence—hope alone; for God has a father's love for those who hope in Him.

About four o'clock in the morning Mother Theodore came into my room, and I suffered to know that she found me so ill. She took my hand silently, for we were afraid to express our thoughts. At five Father Corbe said Mass for me in honor of the Blessed Virgin; it was Saturday, and all the Sisters received Holy Communion. From my bed, so near the chapel, I followed the different parts of the Mass, telling myself that my name was in the memento of the living for the last time, unless the Blessed Virgin would work a miracle to cure me. I did not desire it; God gave me grace to abandon myself entirely to Him.

Ah! my beloved sisters, how the tears of parting and the pain of exile are rewarded at the moment of death! My God! how good and generous You are! How is it possible that we hesitate so long to give ourselves to You?

When Mother Theodore returned, I was still more oppressed. She said that during Mass she had remembered a little bottle of water of La Salette, received a few weeks before from Monsieur Dupont. At those words I assured Mother Theodore that I should be cured, and I asked her what kind of cure she wished. She replied, "A gradual one." For the honor of the Blessed Virgin I should have preferred to be cured suddenly; and, if Mother had desired it, I am certain our Immaculate Queen would have granted it. But as it was for our dear community, and principally for my good superior, that I rejoiced to live, I wished to follow her will.

Scarcely had I swallowed the pure and miraculous water when a happy change took place within me. I asked for something to eat and called for the Sisters, who came one after another to embrace me. Tears of joy replaced the tears of sorrow they were still shedding. It required faith, however, to believe that I was to be cured, for, to this moment of vigor, there succeeded so great a weakness that I was unable to move, to speak, or to see. The noise of a fly buzzing near made me tremble. (This is literally true.) The afternoon was

terrible for my dear Mother Theodore. Every instant she thought me about to expire. In the evening towards nine o'clock, she asked Father Corbe to come to see me; but she dared not inquire what he thought of my condition, lest she should be confirmed in her fears. We all three kept silence, though I was not aware of Mother's cruel anguish, for I had not the shadow of a doubt that I should be cured. Finding myself weaker, I asked for another spoonful of the dear water of La Salette, and I told my superiors that, even should they see me *dead,* they should not be uneasy, but only sprinkle the miraculous water on me and I would resuscitate. In spite of my protestations, when the water was in the spoon, Mother Theodore knelt down and prayed to the Blessed Virgin with all her heart. I saw Father Corbe take off his biretta and do the same. As soon as I had taken the miraculous water I felt reanimated, and a few minutes later I was strong enough to leave my bed and take five or six steps, leaning on the arm of a Sister; but this precaution was for form's sake. Indeed I was stronger than I am even to-day.

I desired ardently to receive Holy Communion the next day, but knowing that Mother Theodore would not permit me to fast until morning, I spoke of it to my Mother, Our Lady of La Salette, to whom nothing is difficult. At midnight the Sister who was with me, believing me dead, shook and awakened me from my first sleep. Mary had exceeded my hopes. Immediately I sent to ask Mother's permission not to drink anything; she granted it, but on several conditions which the Blessed Virgin admirably fulfilled. Towards five o'clock Father Corbe, who had spent part of the night in prayer, was happy to learn what Mary had done for me. He hastened to bring me Holy Communion. All the Sisters, with lighted tapers in their hands, came into the room, weeping for joy. The little table on which I am writing was adorned with blue and white flowers, and the statue of the Blessed Virgin was surrounded by pretty candlesticks. There Jesus reposed for some minutes before entering my heart. This

was one of the sweetest moments of my life, and only the opportunity I had lost of going to heaven could make me regret, even ever so little, being still on earth.

On Saint Francis Xavier's day I delegated Mother Theodore to represent me among the novices, and she did things in grand style. First of all they went to sing hymns to "Our Lady of the Washhouse." Under this title our dear Sister-laundresses find much consolation in honoring a little statue of the Blessed Virgin sent to us by Monsieur Dupont. In her gratitude Mother Theodore joined her voice, which resembles mine, to the fresh voices of her daughters. Then she had a fine collation served, and I shall whisper to you, they even drank a little wine,—something which does not happen every day.

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception I was strong enough to receive Holy Communion in our chapel; and this long letter proves to you that I am now almost as well as before my illness. Pray to the Blessed Virgin that I may faithfully fulfill that for which she has prolonged my life.

Mother Theodore at the same time wrote to Irma's family:

I had to leave to our dear daughter the pleasure of writing to you what God has just done for us, through the medium of her [the Blessed Virgin Mary] by whom all those blessings have come to us with which it has pleased Him to favor our Congregation of the Woods. You will be greatly consoled in reading the details of the week, during which we experienced both profound sorrow and ineffable consolation. How happy you will all be to read and re-read those lines traced by a cherished hand which, a few days ago, was almost cold with the chill of death. How you will thank our Protectress, our Blessed Mother! In all the establishments where we have Sisters, the Holy Sacrifice has already been offered in thanksgiving for the favor that we have just

obtained. Oh! but we promised to love and serve God with more fervor and fidelity than ever. He is so good. It is impossible for me to express to you, my dear friends, what has passed in our hearts, especially what has passed in mine. The heart and soul have sorrows, anguish, and enjoyments that the pen cannot describe, that the tongue cannot express. Your hearts,—yes, yours, will understand this. Sister Saint Francis Xavier is necessary for my existence. She is my oldest daughter, the friend of my soul, in which she reads as I do in hers. I have need of her advice, of her example, I will even say, of her little scoldings. I saw myself, by her death left, as it were, alone in the world, in the midst of a Community that I love, and by which I am tenderly loved; all this is true, and is not the half of what I should like to say. Nevertheless, it was not for myself that I asked her of God, and of His tender Mother who is also ours, with so much earnestness; I asked her for my Sisters, for our dear novices, for our young Congregation which is called to do so much good in this country if God preserves it in His spirit. Who better than this dear Sister can inspire love for virtue by her words and example? The good God knew it well; it was to the interests of His glory to preserve for us this treasure. Her death would have been a great calamity for our mission, an irreparable loss. I was so much the more disconsolate, as I felt I had drawn this misfortune upon us by my infidelities. I promised to become better; ask for me of Our Lord that I may be faithful to my promises, in order that He may preserve a long time this precious companion, and that He may be glorified in our House of the Forest.

In conclusion, allow me to wish you all a good and holy year; Heaven will not shower down upon you more abundant blessings than I wish for you. I beg of you to ask for us, that during the course of the year which we are about to begin, God may send us subjects chosen by Himself, and hence fit for His work, which is ripe and only needs laborers. The Bishop of New Orleans

has just written to offer us two cities in his diocese, wherein to form establishments, but we have not subjects enough even for Indiana.

Later on Mother Theodore deeply regretted not having permitted Irma to ask the Blessed Virgin for an instantaneous cure. "When she proposed it," said Mother, "I was so impressed by the thought that God was going to hear her prayer, and that in a moment, before my very eyes, she would, if I may say so, pass from death to life, that I had not the courage to allow her."

CHAPTER XI

LITTLE DETAILS FROM SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

THE letters which Sister Saint Francis called *Little Details* were those which contained nothing special for the family, and were intended to be read by friends of her sisters. From the abundance of these entertaining notes, we select those of more general interest.

A few days ago [Irma says] we had the consolation of learning that one of our Protestant pupils opened heaven's door for two little dying children. This is not the only instance; nearly every month some of our former pupils do the same. They take great pride in writing us the details of such matters. One of them, a Catholic, has, by the grace of God, just effected the conversion of a very eminent physician. He acknowledges that were it not for Miss Mary he would never have been baptized. He is very rich and intends to have a church built in the city where he resides. He has just sent us his daughter to be prepared for holy baptism, and the young lady hopes that her mother will soon have the same happiness. How rightly Saint Paul could fear that after having preached to others, he himself might become a castaway. Poor Mary, who was instrumental in these conversions, recently had the weakness to marry an obstinate Jew.

Eliza, one of our pupils, some years after leaving school fell ill of consumption. She thought at once of being baptized, and sought permission to return to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, but her parents opposed it. From the day she had asked to become a Catholic, they

never left her alone. Her strength was daily diminishing, and her only consolation was a little Catholic book we had given her, and a medal of the Blessed Virgin which she always wore. Eliza made a last attempt to see a priest, but without success. Her parents positively refused to receive a priest and called in a minister. The poor girl declared she would rather die than receive baptism from a heretic, and she sent away the minister, who left in great indignation. She then fell into a profound melancholy and died shortly after. Her parents are now inconsolable for their cruelty in refusing the last request of their dying daughter. But, O mysterious and sweet ways of Providence! I have just learned that a day or two before her death Eliza received private baptism.[1] Rejoice with me, for indeed I had mourned over this child. The good news is not generally known.

We hope that on All Saints' day the Church militant will celebrate with the Church triumphant a victory over the demon. A young American woman, wife of one of our workmen, will probably make her First Communion. She has already gone to confession four or five times, and has asked us for a new dress for the occasion.

One of our neighbors, a wealthy man but without religious convictions, was expecting the arrival of a brother from Europe. He had bought for him a farm of immense extent and had employed every care to cultivate and improve it. The brother, a man of upright character and brilliant education, found, on his arrival, that the property was too isolated to suit his taste. Perhaps to find some diversion, he used to come to our church to hear the sermons, and later took up the study of our holy religion. Soon he was attacked by illness, and immediately he sent for a priest. After a confession during which he manifested the deepest contrition, he obtained the grace of dying in the Catholic Church.

[1] Two days before Eliza's death, her parents gave a large dinner party, during which a Catholic lady left the table, and finding Eliza alone, baptized her.

His interment took place with all possible solemnity at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The solemnity, of course, could not compare with what is seen in European countries, but such as it is, it is very touching and makes a profound impression.

His death upset all the plans for future happiness of the remaining brother, who for many years had lived only for the one now gone. The property which he had beautified in the hope of spending his life there with the only member of his family in America no longer sufficed for his heart.

A few weeks ago he came to our chaplain, saying: "Please hear my confession; I cannot sleep any more; I wish to go to confession." Father Corbe, thinking he was a little intoxicated, advised him to make his examination of conscience and to return the next day. The poor man took the road which led to his farm, but he could not proceed, so agitated was he by remorse and anxiety. At last he retraced his steps, and asked in so supplicating a manner to go to confession that Father Corbe could not refuse. He had received baptism in his infancy, and we hope that he will soon make his First Communion.

This good news will console you a little for the burning of the house of the Sisters of Charity at Fredericktown. The incendiaries, before enkindling the fire, disabled the fire engines so that the progress of the fire could not be arrested. The house was burned to the ground. We may, perhaps, have to endure a similar misfortune. A few days ago we received an anonymous letter warning us to be on our guard. For two or three nights our workmen have watched, armed with guns. Some men were found hiding in our fields, but God permitted one of our neighbors to see them. We trust that the Blessed Virgin, who has always been a mother to us, will continue to protect our poor community.

I have already told you that our mission at Madison is greatly exposed to the persecutions of the enemies of Catholicity. Not long since, our Sisters wrote that the Presbyterian minister assembled his congregation in the

church, and then, transported by the *Spirit,* disclosed all the infamies perpetrated by priests and nuns since the beginning of the Church! He ended his harangue by hurling anathemas against the parents who sent their children to Catholic schools, and he predicted that they would not escape the divine vengeance. "When we go to Mass," wrote one of our Sisters at this time, "the little rogues of boys, seeing us with our pupils, run after us, screaming, 'Sheep, sheep, sheep!' They also pelt us with snowballs (but that does not hurt us), and sometimes even with eggs and stones."

The persecutions that our Sisters have been suffering at Madison are somewhat abated. Their most formidable adversary, however (Mr. Curtis), called together three hundred ministers last month, in order to devise *in council* some means of doing away with the *nuns.* But God laughs at the designs of men. Their ridiculous assembly inspired only contempt, and since that time the people are more favorably disposed toward our holy religion.

There is here an apostate monk from Italy, who goes from city to city giving lectures on the progress and danger of Catholicity. He was lately at Cincinnati, and I read a portion of his sixth discourse from which I quote: "When the demon wished to introduce evil into the world he made use of woman to corrupt man; now, to introduce Catholicism into America, he makes use of the nuns, true Eves, with their sweet and engaging manners, their knowledge, and their attractions. The Jesuits are dangerous, but the nuns are their agents, and are still more to be feared. Guard against sending your children to their schools, and even against placing among them servants trained by the Sisters, for they will instill their bad principles into the hearts of your children. The evil is greater than you think; and I know better than you that Catholicism is daily increasing," etc.

We do indeed remove the prejudices of our pupils. The parents have to choose between the inferiority of

the other schools and what they call the *superstition* of ours; but, as many prefer having their children well instructed, they send them to us. Our boarding school is the best in Indiana, and would be considered very good even in France. We have about eighty pupils and several others are expected. I have never met young girls better taught than our first pupils. Mr. Pinatel, an old naval officer, was astonished at their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. As these subjects and drawing were the ones to which he had principally devoted himself, this part of the examination pleased him best. The children especially excel, however, in Christian doctrine and in sacred and ecclesiastical history. They were highly commended, and with good reason, for the skill they show with the needle, particularly in plain sewing.

Every kind of absurdity and calumny finds acceptance with some of the people here. They were even so foolish as to believe that our chaplain had horns. One mischievous little woman, now a Catholic, told the villagers that if each of them would give her twenty-five cents, she would beg Father Corbe to take off his hat and let them see the horns. Not seeing them on his head the people wanted to look in his hat, supposing he had left them there.

A solicitous friend wrote as follows to an old lady who had her daughter in our school at Terre Haute: "Dear Madam: Although I have not the honor of your acquaintance, the interest I take in your daughter prompts me to tell you that, if you leave her with the nuns, she will be lost. Twenty years from now she will remember the detestable principles she has imbibed there; and if she does not become a Catholic, she will at least defend the Sisters all her life and on all occasions."

The good lady replied that she was old enough to judge for herself and wise enough to know how to bring up her own children; that not only would she leave her daughter with the good Sisters, but that she herself, when her dear husband should be no more, would offer

herself to the Sisters, not to teach in the boarding school, but to serve them in their houses, an office she would consider an honor. We have the strangest imaginable applications for admission. Some, like this lady, still have their dear husbands, and are not even baptized; others ask to be received for a year only, in the absence of their husbands; others would like to be Sisters, but have not yet decided to become Catholics, and so on.

CHAPTER XII

DETAILS OF IRMA'S FAMILY

TO render the following letters intelligible to the reader, it is necessary to mention several important events which took place in the family of Sister Saint Francis from 1847 to 1852. Allusions to current happenings in the household at Saint Servan occur so frequently in Irma's letters as to require some explanation.

In 1847 her aunt, Madame Henri le Fer de la Motte, died, leaving six very young children, and a husband who was affected with heart disease. Mademoiselle Pepa le Fer, Irma's sister, offered to go to live at her uncle's, in order to assist him in the difficult task of bringing up his children, and to console him as much as was in her power for the loss he had just sustained. The same year Mademoiselle de la Salle, Irma's cousin, married Monsieur Charles Vittu de Kraoul, and another of her cousins, Mademoiselle Olivia le Fer de Chantelou, married Monsieur des Cognets.

In 1850 one of her father's sisters, Mademoiselle Jeanne le Fer de la Motte, who lived at Lorette and had consecrated her life to the orphan asylum of Nazareth, was carried off in a few hours by a stroke of apoplexy. Like the good Abbé Cardonnet, she was struck down at the foot of the altar, and like him, too, she was able only to cross the threshold of the sanctuary before crossing that of eternity. Three months had hardly passed when Monsieur Henri le Fer de la Motte suc-

cumbed in his turn—a victim to heart disease, against which he had been struggling for several years. His death, like his life, was full of faith, courage, and Christian resignation. On the last day of his life, the return home of his two eldest sons, who had just passed their examination at Brest, was expected. He counted the hours, even the minutes; but death was rapidly approaching and, it seemed, would arrive first. In a suspense which naturally would have ended his life, he offered to God the last and painful sacrifice of dying without seeing and embracing his children. God willed, however, to prolong his agony, and on the brink of the grave granted him this supreme consolation: the father saw his sons, and for an hour, the last of his life, he was able, with a firm voice and an undaunted heart, to give them the last great counsels of a Christian father, counsels to which death affixes a sacred character and an ineffaceable remembrance.

After the death of Monsieur Henri le Fer de la Motte, his four young sons were taken by Irma's father and cared for at Saint Servan; the daughters were confided to their aunt, Madame de la Salle, and went to live at Lorette.

Despite so many bereavements, the year 1851 was a happy one for Irma's family. Charles, the eldest son, for whom Irma had a special affection, had during a voyage in the Pacific, made the acquaintance of a charming young lady, Mademoiselle Natalia Valdivieso of Valparaiso, Chile. He had the happiness of winning her heart, but as her mother was seriously ill, she could not think of leaving her when Monsieur Charles le Fer was recalled to France. Shortly after his return he learned of the death of Madame Valdivieso. His duties as a naval officer not permitting him to go himself to

claim his bride, he was represented in Chile by a French gentleman, one of his friends, and contracted thus, before God and man, a union blessed and approved by the Church and sanctioned equally by the laws of Chile. During her long voyage from South America to France, Madame Natalia le Fer was exposed to great dangers from the sea, from fire, and from yellow fever. At last, after seven months of anguish and anxiety, Monsieur Charles le Fer had the happiness of receiving her at Lorient, where he was awaiting her. The entire family had shared the uneasiness caused by the long delays of the journey; but their anxiety was changed into thanksgiving at the arrival of her whom they loved in advance, and who entered the Le Fer family only to bring into it and to receive her share of tenderness and affection.

Irma's father did not long enjoy the presence of his dear Chilian daughter; early in 1852 God called him to Himself; thus was ended the life of labor which he had so generously accomplished here below.

In the same year two of Irma's sisters left the paternal roof, Cecile to marry Monsieur Joseph Choësnet, Elvire to join her sister at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

To Her Aunt, Madame de la Salle

On the occasion of her cousin Marie's marriage to Monsieur Vittu de Kraoul, 1847, Irma wrote:

I have been reproached on all sides for having so long deferred my letter to dear Marie. I did wrong to make the least delay, but I was so sure you knew my sincere interest in this dear cousin that I took time to weep over two Sisters whom God has this month taken from us.

A real fault which I have committed, confessed,

and I hope have been pardoned, is to have wished, like Laban, that the eldest daughter would go first. Marie has said so often since she was five years old, "I shall be an old maid," that she should not be astonished at my surprise. Of course I never thought she was to ride to paradise in a carriage; but deep in my soul there was a hope, perhaps too human, that the dear child would belong to God alone. Our Lord had other designs on her which He has accomplished for her happiness, I trust, and for yours also. My dear Marie! I did not think I loved her so much. She has had many of my prayers, and my heart will always be devoted to her. We were the two worst daughters of the Abbé Cardonnet, but I hope we shall have a cozy little place near him in heaven. Do you not feel joy in thinking he is there awaiting us, praying to God for us, interested in whatever happens to us, and that he is happy, happy forever? I wish, nevertheless, he could still be with us; where will you find another such friend? Alas! my desire is very imperfect, for Our Lord remains with you and can take the place of all, yes, even of our beloved grandmother and our good Abbé Cardonnet. I still love my family too much. I should like to see all go to heaven together, so that we should not have to weep over one another, as you are now doing over dear Aunt de la Motte,[1] who has gone to our home in the courts of bliss eternal.

When I consider that I was the first of all to leave you, and that I am still on the road, it almost grieves me. Yet I came here for my poor neighbor, and God blesses so generously the little we do for Him that it would be a pity to regret being on earth a few years longer.

The following year she wrote again to this aunt:

I love my cousin Charles[2] very much. Last night I saw him in a dream; he seemed somewhat dark and had a black beard. He gave me his hand, according to

1 Madame Henri le Fer de la Motte, born Grout de Rivière.
2 Husband of Marie de la Salle de Kraoul.

the American fashion, but at a little sign from Marie we embraced each other very cordially.

On the feast of the Assumption I prayed very fervently for the Maries. The 4th of November I shall recommend in my prayers one Charles more. My good aunt, be assured that if God reserves great joy or sorrows for you, there will be at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods a heart that will share them. Oh! what a feast I am anticipating on seeing you all again in heaven! You will make me acquainted with the new members of the family, and I shall show you your American grandnephews and grandnieces.

At another time to the same aunt she says:

The other day while with our young Sisters, who were filling our bed ticks with corn husks, I talked to them of my grandmother, of my uncle (Monsieur de C——), and of his conversion. It was a pleasure to relate what grandmother used to say to him in order to touch his heart and bring him to God. This father of a family could never visit his aunt without hearing her say to him, "My little lad, I beg you to go to confession." Tired of the phrase, Monsieur de C—— replied one day with some vivacity, "Certainly, aunt, you would not wish me to go to confession merely to please you?" "Yes, my child; go the first time for nothing else, and we shall then see about the second." He did so, and grace recompensed the effort made through human affection. I told the Sisters of my grandmother's devotion to Saint Joseph, her ardent faith, and her love of prayer which escaped from her lips as naturally as the perfume is exhaled from the petals of a flower.

Oh! what consolation I found in speaking thus of the virtues of my dear grandmother. More than once I saw tears in the eyes of the Sisters, and you may believe mine were not too dry. I often say that it was my godmother who endowed me with this gift of *sweating of the eyes.* Dear Aunt Marie! she had so many other good things to give me she might have kept this for

herself, particularly as Mother Theodore cannot endure it. Whenever I gently wipe the tip of my nose, I suddenly receive a more than gentle tap on my shoulder. I have so bad a reputation in this respect that I have to sneeze at least three times before they will believe I have a cold. We have family defects which we carry to all countries, but the worst of all, as Henri says, is that we love one another so much.

To Her Sister Pepa

(Residing with her uncle, Monsieur le Fer de la Motte, and taking care of her young cousins.)

[1847 or 1848].

My dear sister, I hope you have experienced the effect of the novena made here for you. Let God take care of you while you take care of others. Ah! my dear sister, believe me you have nothing, or almost nothing to suffer. There are not, perhaps, in the whole world three families as happy as ours. I am ashamed of you when I read what the holy Fathers say on the necessity of suffering. What reassures me is that you make crosses for yourself, and by this means you are on the royal way. If you could know, as Mother Theodore and I do, how few truly happy people there are, you would spend half of your life in thanksgiving. To have parents like ours is a favor which we can never appreciate. Charles said to me once, in speaking of my father, "He is the most honest man I have ever known." The expression made me smile at the time, yet it is nevertheless true, for as Fénelon says, great souls alone know the glory of being good.

Be assured I sympathize with you in your trials; in former times, I, like you, did not know the storms of Mount Calvary. You have heard something of our troubles. I think there are few communities tried as ours is. Let us bless the holy will of God in all our afflictions, remembering that it is not the one who has done most, but the one who has loved and suffered most, that will receive the brightest crown. The roses of

paradise have their roots here below; let us not fear to wound ourselves with the thorns, if in the heavenly garden we wish to gather the blossoms, for with our empurpled hands we shall weave a brilliant wreath of glory.

I know the extent of your sacrifice in leaving our father and mother to devote yourself to the education of our dear little cousins. It is a noble but also a very difficult task. Isabelle is, perhaps, the one who in the future will give you the most satisfaction. I offered my Holy Communion for Frederick on the 10th of May, the day of his First Communion. You and my dear uncle are never separated in my prayers and in my affection. Say to Olivia that I did not forget her on the day of her marriage. Much love to her sisters and to our new cousin.

Irma thanks her mother for news of her brothers:

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, 1849.

Your letter, dear mother, was like a tête-à-tête on the Thursdays of long ago,[1] and all you wrote of our dear boys has interested me much. I imagine Charles is now at Saint Servan telling you of his travels. I have read and reread, and I shall read again, the account of his expedition to New Caledonia. We should rejoice that he is laboring for our holy religion. God knows it; this suffices. You were right in thinking how happy this news would make me. I should like so much to have his interesting details of the missions of Oceanica published in the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith.* Will not this dear brother pay me a visit in one of his voyages? Tell him that he can come from New Orleans to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in four days.

Is Eugene still pleased where he is? There is a postulant here who has his sweet smile. I have had the pleasure of conversing with a fellow-student of Paul,

1 A day on which Irma and her mother, being often alone together, spoke heart to heart.

Abbé Contin, of Chateauneuf. He is staying here during the absence of Father Corbe, whom Bishop de Saint Palais has taken as theologian to the Council of Baltimore. He is a very learned man, and I have looked over my Latin with him in an old grammar, half the leaves of which my *lupus* [1] had eaten up. From time to time I stopped to recall the past, especially at *me pœnitet, me pudet,* the lesson most terrible for poor Paul.

Shall I confess to you something that gave me great pleasure? To understand it fully one must have spent eight years among these grave Americans. Well, the pleasure was to hear Abbé Contin *scramble down* the stairs as my brothers used to do. I also reviewed algebra and geometry with him. I can understand how very fatiguing *plus* and *minus* must be for young heads. The Americans are better fitted than we for studies of this sort, because their imagination does not trouble them.

You ask if I know young Roquet.[2] Why, he is chief singer in our church! We consider him as a child of the house, and he regards us as part of his family. He is married to one of our neighbors, and he has a little daughter [3] whom he thinks charming, and she certainly is. Mother Theodore makes him do as she pleases; indeed she exercises great influence on all around her.

Poor Marcile's [4] shop was destroyed by fire, but the people of Vincennes brought in another for him which was three miles from the city; emigrations of this kind are truly droll. While Mother Theodore was at dinner in a three-story house in New York, she felt herself being moved, and upon asking the cause of the motion was told very composedly that they were moving the house to another street.

Napoleon's nomination astonished us much. God wills it; I say no more. Is my dear uncle still an in-

1 Paul her brother.
2 A young man who had lived at Saint Servan.
3 Mrs. Margaret Roquet Wheeler.
4 Marcile, a builder, formerly of Saint Servan.

valid? He suffers so patiently that I cannot pity him. My father and he are destined to occupy in heaven the places of the patriarchs of our families. The younger ones will be too low unless their heads are raised a little.

To Her Aunt, Mademoiselle Marie le Fer

January, 1850.

At last, my beloved aunt, I come to have a talk with you; and, to tell the truth, I am employing thus a time when I can do nothing else. It will be like one of our little evening chats in the chimney corner while we were waiting for the lighting of the candles. We used to say then, "We shall not be losing our time, for we cannot see to work, so we can talk in peace."

Tell me now, how is your dear heart? Will the poor little thing never grow old? I thought that after the death of those who have been taken from us you would be more *free;* on the contrary, you tell me you are worse than before, because you fear for the health and the life of those who remain. I do not know what remedy to suggest, since neither absence nor death can heal your wounds. "Love is strong as death," says Solomon. Well, it should be stronger than death, for the love of God must triumph over your heart. I think I hear you answer: "I should, indeed, be happy if I could love God; but I am so distracted at my prayers, so cold in my Communions, so uneasy when there is sickness in the family. I should like to love for God's sake only, but nature makes itself felt." Yes, I believe you have said the truth; but should you despond because you cannot overcome your weakness? No, no; perhaps you would become too *proud,* if you could love God according to your liking; perhaps you would not be compassionate toward the weak, if you did not make one of the number. Our Lord will love you just as you are, so long as you do not love yourself too much. Ah! see what glory it will be for Him to have *towed* such a bark as yours into heaven. All the saints and angels will

rejoice and say: "Behold among us the one whose heart was glued to every creature, who was able only to fear and to weep! Who can have brought her here?" You will point to Our Lord and say to them: "He who left ninety-nine sheep in the desert to go after the one that had strayed away, carried me here on His shoulders. That is why you see me among you." You will lay your crown at His feet, and leave to the other saints the palm of the victorious. I think I shall have to do the same. But we will not be jealous of the others; will we?

I received a long letter from my mother, in which she speaks of you all. She tells me that little Charles [de Kraoul] is charming; kiss him for me, also his brother George. The other night I had a dream. I had returned to Lorette, (this often happens). You were, as usual, very good, very amiable, but the drawing-room had a mournful air, and my grandmother's old armchair was vacant. "It is useless," you said to me, weeping, "it is useless to try to be cheerful; her place can never be filled." I replied that my aunt, Madame de la Salle, having much of her mother's character, was perhaps capable of taking her place; but my dear aunt approached me and said, "We love one another, but our center of happiness is taken away, our chief is no more; never can I replace our mother." Would you believe that this dream followed me throughout the day? I said to Our Lord that henceforth He would be the center of our happiness, and I thanked Him for taking to Himself our good grandmother, to give her back to us some day in heaven.

Upon learning of the death of her aunt, Mademoiselle Jeanne le Fer de la Motte, Irma wrote:

To Her Aunt, Madame de la Salle

Another vacant place in dear Lorette, and another saint in heaven! So my good Aunt Jeanne is dead! I can hardly believe it. It seems to me I still see her asleep in her armchair near the glass door. But her

death, too, is a sleep. Tell me all about her last moments, for, though mamma promised that Eugenie would give me the particulars, she has not done so.

Cecile told me about aunt's last interview with my uncle. How little we know what is to happen to us! I hardly dare to write to uncle, so much am I distressed on his account; and yet after all, may I not go before he does? How good it is to abandon ourselves to the will of God! He alone knows the favorable time to call us to Himself. When Mother Theodore received mamma's letter, I had the headache. The good Mother was like a spirit about my bed, for she cannot hide anything from me. I talked of my holy Aunt Jeanne, and I said she was the only person I knew that loved humiliations. But how little I thought then that she was already crowned with glory! The next day, when my headache had left me, Mother Theodore announced to me what nature calls sad news, but what faith terms a favor. I shed tears, but my tears were of tenderness and gratitude when I remembered the generous heart Our Lord had given my dearly loved aunt. Oh! how He loved her, how He loves you, how He loves us all! With all my heart I echoed uncle's words, "The distance which separates us is so short that we should not be afflicted at her departure." I feel that she is too happy to be wept over. I pray for her and I invoke her. Our Sisters made the Way of the Cross for her; but I must confess that neither Mother Theodore nor I feel like praying for her, for we seem to see her in heaven interceding for all our family, for the Providence of Nazareth, for the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, and also for the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. She loved us dearly.

I must admit, however, that when I think of my dear godmother[1] my heart sinks. I know her weakness, yet I am reassured in calling to mind what Our Lord can do with a reed. I pray for her, she may be sure of that. Yet a little while longer and we shall all be in our beautiful paradise—grandmother, uncle, aunts,

[1] Marie de la Motte, Aunt Jeanne's sister.

brothers and sisters—and when we are all together again, we shall laugh at the tears we shed on earth.

It seems to me, as I have said before, that those who die become my neighbors. They hear me, they see me, and, what is more, they obtain my requests. Notwithstanding the comfort of being so near my saintly aunt, I am overcome by an indescribable feeling of shame. She, who always judged so charitably of others, without doubt believed me to be a true religious. But when I think of her astonishment at finding me so full of defects, I hide my face in my hands and almost die of confusion. For you must know that I am far from perfect, that I am proud, impatient, etc., etc. I say this to you, so you will not have to learn it from Our Lord when He speaks to you in heaven of His poor child. And yet I find comfort in the thought that, seeing my faults, she will pray that I may become better. She also will astonish us when all her mortifications and humiliations are revealed. Tell me something of them when you write; tell me everything you know about her.

Later on Sister Saint Francis wrote:

I have just come from a distribution of prizes to the children of our *log house*. I, being the superintendent of our free school, invited Mother Theodore to preside and to make an address. The assembly was large. Unfortunately for me, my superior after looking at the premiums said terrible things to me in French, such as: "If you invite me again to give such horrors, I shall burn the premiums and the table too." Her indignation, however, did not prevent the ceremony from being quite fine. Parents and children alike were delighted with the rewards. Yet, to appease Mother Theodore, I shall ask you to send for next year some little flutes and spinning tops. My good Bishop Bazin acted much better than Mother Theodore under similar circumstances. When he came to see us for the first time at Vincennes, I was just about to give, as a prize for

catechism, a hazelnut fashioned into a basket with a little ribbon for a handle. I offered it to the bishop to present, and he did so with all the dignity of a bishop; but you may be sure our Sisters made me pay for my nut!

About a month ago we had First Communion. Olivier [1] is the last of our family; but every year we here have children to present to Our Lord. Our little girls are very fervent, and, to show their love for God, they practice all kinds of mortification. The other day after they had lighted a candle before a statue of the Blessed Virgin, their ardent zeal prompted them to burn their fingers in her honor. They were in the act of doing so when, fortunately, a Sister entered. This reminds me of your telling us how you once dragged yourself on your knees over the nails in the floor. What consoles us most is that the children are correcting their faults. On the day of First Communion three of our pupils were baptized, which makes seven who have had this happiness during the year. Poor Charlotte, of whom I spoke to my father, has been refused by her parents; yet she has not given up her desire of being a Catholic, and is preparing to be driven from her home.

Adieu, my cherished aunt; believe me, I love you just as much as when Cecile and I prayed it might rain hard, so that my father would let me spend the night at Lorette. I love you now, as then, in Him, who made the calm and the storm—I love you in God, in whom there is no change.

Mother Theodore to Madame le Fer

June 3, 1851.

Madame and very dear Friend,

I reproach myself severely for having delayed the letter of your dear daughter for some days. I did not wish to let it start without writing and letting you know that from the bottom of my heart I share in all your sorrows and pain. God afflicts you. He has

[1] The youngest of her uncle's four sons.

called away two persons, worthy objects of your affection and that of your family. You have deeply felt these separations, but in the midst of your tears and sorrows, how greatly you have all been consoled by the thought of the happiness which they now enjoy in heaven. For my part, I am more inclined to invoke them than to pray for them; you have really a family of saints. I often tell Sister Saint Francis that I forgive her willingly for loving you so much. I gladly share her sentiments; for I feel in my heart an affection so tender and so full of respect for your whole family, that I sometimes fear lest I go too far. Natalia too has already a great share in our love and in our prayers. I hope you will have embraced her when you receive this letter, and I trust she will be like your other daughters. God gives her to you for your consolation and, I believe, for the salvation of a soul which is very dear to us.

Sister Saint Francis wrote you, I suppose, that we had both been ill in November, she at Saint Mary's and I at Vincennes. Never did I suffer more than in being away from this dear child during her illness. I had the presumption to think that no one could take care of her as well as I could. I even said so, and behaved very badly, I must admit. But I was not the only one; the dear sick child was not more reasonable. We were laughed at a little, and we also laughed when we were together again. You must not be disedified at our behavior; we truly love each other very tenderly, but I do not think this affection is displeasing to God. If I were to lose Sister Saint Francis now, where would I find a Mistress of Novices who would, by her words and example, cause virtue to be loved and cherished as she does? These chosen and privileged souls are rare even in France; you know it, dear mother, and you will excuse my predilection. Here no one is jealous of it; every one else loves her very much also; who could help loving her? Oh! our good God does not forbid us to love, happily for Madame le Fer, is it not? To love in the right way is to accomplish the whole law; it is to begin that happy life which will have its perfection only

in heaven where we shall live forever with a holy and perfect love.

Were I to try to thank you, dear Madame le Fer, for all your favors in particular, I should have to write a volume; for what do we not owe to your generosity? We tell our gratitude to God; yes, to Him we confide the care of rewarding the good that for His love you have done to the poor daughters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. I dare hope that, in His infinite bounty, He will listen to the supplications we offer for you and all your family, prayers by which we ask His graces and blessings in time, and the happiness of possessing Him in eternity. Be pleased, Madame, to be the interpreter to your dear children of my sentiments; especially do not forget Monsieur le Fer, for whom I entertain a sentiment of profound veneration.

With filial affection for yourself, dear mother, I am all yours in Our Lord,

SISTER THEODORE.

IRMA TO HER FATHER

March, 1851.

I hope our dear Natalia will have come to the end of her journey when this letter reaches you. I am glad she is called Joanna de Dios; this Saint John is one of my friends. I seem to see you all, according to your various fashions, preparing to receive her: my mother hastening about, making purchases, decorating the house, etc.; and you, cherished father, searching the depths of your memory for some old Spanish words. How good God is to have given Charles this dear child! The older I grow, the more I am convinced that God loves our family with a love of predilection.

I thought I had made an extraordinary "expedition," but Natalia has surpassed me. Now a journey can be made from New York to Havre in nine days, and from New York to Terre Haute in three days; thus, in less than fifteen days Saint Mary-of-the-Woods may be reached from Saint Servan. But, my dear father, in

one second we may be united to the Heart of Our Lord. Let us not think of any other *rendezvous* on earth; we shall have a whole eternity to be happy together. Our hearts and our thoughts communicate more swiftly than the telegraph system in the United States which, by means of an electric wire, brings news in a few minutes from New York to Terre Haute. Though the little incidents of our lives may be unknown to one another, we feel the same emotions, we desire the same graces, we are thankful for the same favors, we love the same God, and we hope for the same felicity. Oh! what sweet ties!

During March, Saint Joseph's month, I often think of my dear grandmother. I believe she has obtained for me a true devotion to her dear *bon homme,* as she used to call him. He is a never failing source of success to me. I go into more minute details in talking to him of our family affairs than I do even with the Blessed Virgin, and this great Saint does all I ask him.

In another letter to her father she says:

Towards the end of last month I paid a visit to Vincennes. You cannot imagine what a pleasure it was for me to be among our little orphans. They represent nearly all the different nationalities. Many of them who belong to non-Catholic families have been baptized. It would delight you to hear them say the Litany of Divine Providence: "Providence of God, support of the orphans," "Providence of God, which nourishes those that are hungry," etc. And you should see with what relish they eat what the good Providence sends them. Their appetite filled me with wonder then, but now the memory of it alarms me, for supplies are very scarce this winter and, unless God sends them aid, they will suffer much. A collection will be taken up for them at Christmas, but, if it is not successful, we shall have the grief of seeing many of these poor little ones thrown back upon the world.

I do not know whether in my last letter I sufficiently

described the joy of our pupils at the arrival of the box, and at the sight of your Caroline [a doll]. It is like the robes of *Peau-d'ane,* they said, always more and more beautiful. Nothing was heard but exclamations of gratitude. They must have the pattern of its dress and spencer. The youngest said, "Look at her feet and her little hands, and her eyes with tears in them!" Your boxes are always greeted with shouts of joy. Thank you, my beloved father.

May I ask you to thank Pauline Demolon for her pretty pearl necklace? I placed it among the ornaments of the tabernacle. I could not find a more honorable place for it. Thank also dear Helenie Lefrançois for the beautiful holy-water font. We shall repay her with our prayers.

To Her Sister Clementine

Though I am no longer with you in the evening to *listen to your thoughts,* my dear little sister, you have always near you a good friend, your Guardian Angel who now does all the work. When I was home, I tried to help him a little, but at your age then that little was not very acceptable. My dear child, when I was young I was once like you and cared little for advice. Now, however, you would like to have your poor godmother at your side. You have really not lost her, for I shall whisper where to find her. Go and place yourself with great confidence and humility before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel at Nazareth, and there knock at the door of the Heart of Jesus. He will open it and you will enter, and there in a little corner you will find your Irma with all her weaknesses. Do not fear that your relatives will prevent your admittance there. I gave you to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament the day of your First Communion and, yesterday, when reminding our good Savior of that gift, I asked Him how a present given with so good a heart could be refused.

You are now at an age when vocation may be known. Having told you to confide yourself to the tender Heart

of Jesus, my further advice is: every day, at the end of your meditations, address a short prayer to this Divine Heart and to the Heart of Mary, that they may give you the means of consecrating yourself to their service.

The vocation to a religious life is nothing else than the desire of this vocation when there is no impediment either in body or mind. Bad health is an obstacle for the body; a head filled with crooked notions, or scrupulosity is an obstacle for the mind. When I was in the world I believed *vocation* to be a sort of *personage* that would seize me and force me to follow it. And indeed my vocation was of that kind. Perhaps it was needful, for instead of having a desire, I was afraid to become a religious. God had to say to me through Père Besnoin, "You must go to America." God has since called me to decide the vocation of others, and I have not yet found one resembling mine. Some of the young girls here had not even thought of consulting their confessor. They ask admittance because they hope to be saved more surely, or to aid their neighbor, or because religious seem to be happy. God is satisfied with these motives, and He afterwards perfects them.

Some young girls fear to embrace a religious life because they lack the courage to overcome and to renounce themselves. They hear an interior voice, an appeal urging them, and, though they have no relish for a religious vocation, nevertheless they have one. Call to mind what Saint Francis de Sales says, "Perfection is not a robe entirely finished that one can throw over the shoulders on the first day." Vocation is the sweet and dear labor which brings it to completion. Let us every day put a stitch in this robe of ours, and it will, in the end, be beautifully embroidered. Saint Teresa tells us also that a person who wishes to give herself to God experiences difficulties only while deliberating whether she should or should not; as soon as she has made up her mind she finds hardly any obstacle in the road of perfection. Every day, my dear child, perform some little mortifications or an act of charity; then decide on a time to consult either a Jesuit Father or Monseigneur de

Saint Palais when he passes through Saint Servan. Tell all that passes in your soul, *good and bad,* and follow the advice then given you. If you are told to remain in the world, remain there; to be a religious in France, obey; to come to America, come. Belong to God, entirely to Him, wherever you can most love Him and cause Him most to be loved. I have never asked that you might be with me, but I do ask unceasingly that you may be called to share my happy portion.

About the same time she wrote to one of her friends, a lady whom she knew to be opposed to religious vocations:

It is always with pleasure, dear madame, that I hear news of you through my family; and although they tell me you continue the *rôle* of *Satan,* this does not prevent my loving you. The wicked one drove our first parents from the terrestrial paradise, and you—you would prevent souls from entering it;—I assure you that the religious life is a little paradise. It is true there are many forbidden fruits, but when once we have put our hand on the tree of life we easily dispense with the others. I do not speak in this way to your sister, so do not be curious, for that would be to impersonate Mother Eve after playing the part of the serpent. . . . I have been informed of your pleasures this summer, and in the depths of my solitude I recalled the pleasant moments we passed together. . . . Saint Jerome, to drive away the remembrance of the pleasures he enjoyed when in Rome, rolled himself on the burning sands of the desert. Far happier than he, I can recall without remorse and without trouble, the innocent pleasures I enjoyed among my true friends and in the midst of my beloved family. While thanking God for the blessed lot with which He has favored me, I think often of those whom I loved in the world. I try to repay with prayers all they have done for me and my dear mission of Vincennes, which are blended into one in my soul.

To this lady's sister, whose virtue and piety seemed

to promise a more intimate union with God, Irma wrote thus:

I do not know whether I shall ever again see you on this earth, where we met for a few short hours only. There are some fragrant flowers of which, if we touch them in passing, we shall long retain the delicious perfume. Such you have been for me. Yes, my dear mademoiselle, there remains in my mind a lasting impression of your brief sojourn at Saint Servan, and a deep conviction that my soul was made to understand yours. Surely it was not in vain that God put this germ of tenderness into my heart. It is sweet to me to hope that we shall meet in God. There is no ocean for souls to cross, or rather God will be the ocean of ours. Poor little rivulets, we are destined to flow through lands far apart, but we shall meet one day in the bosom of God. It is there that waters which in their passage have not been polluted by the slime of earth shall be united forever.

CHAPTER XIII

DEATH OF IRMA'S FATHER—A GOOD FRIEND, MONSIEUR DUPONT, "THE HOLY MAN OF TOURS"

IN 1852 Irma's family was very painfully afflicted by the loss of its chief, whom death carried off from the love of his children and from the esteem of his numerous friends. Although the delicate health of Monsieur le Fer had accustomed him long before to continual sufferings, he often expressed a fear of being wanting in courage and resignation, if God should send him a prolonged illness. The malady which terminated his life was very painful and lasted two months; yet his patience never failed. One of his daughters once remarked: "It must be admitted that Our Lord, who loves you more than we do, has a totally different manner of showing His love. While we try every possible means of relieving you, He augments your sufferings every day." "My daughter," he replied, "you seek to procure for me earthly happiness, and God desires for me an eternal blessedness; you love me for earth, He for heaven."

On the 8th of April, Monsieur le Fer de la Motte ended in peace a life that had been faithfully employed in the service of God and of his neighbor, and in the care of bringing up his numerous family. Death had never been to him a cause of fear. "When I think of God," he used to say, "He seems so good that it is impossible to be afraid." With truth, also, could he pronounce the touching words of Frederick Ozanam, "How shall I fear Him whom I love so much?"

As soon as Sister Saint Francis heard of her father's death, she hastened to sympathize with her family in their grief, a grief which was also her own. She wrote:

May the holy will of God be done and adored!

My dearly beloved Mother: God has asked of us a very great sacrifice. The favors He grants us are often paid for with tears. I had hoped that He would be contented with the absence of your dear children, but, my mother, what is this now but absence? We shall soon see him again. "They do not *die* in your family; they simply go to heaven," said Sister X——, heaving a sigh. It is not the same in her own family.

How much I have suffered on your account since I heard of the seriousness of my poor father's illness. I prayed more for you than for him, for I abandoned him to Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Alas! I thought my resignation would have touched this dear Jesus, who so much loves our confidence. I offered father specially on Holy Thursday and I spent nearly the whole of that day in our little chapel. There I prayed, I wept, I loved. I read these touching lines in the "Last Discourse" of our Lord: *Because I have said, I go, you are sad. But I will ask my Father, and He will send you a Comforter. . . . Let not your heart be troubled: fear not. . . .*

Last evening, after experiencing an agony of grief, I felt an inexpressible joy. It seemed to me that Our Lord permitted me to go to see my father for a little while in heaven. How happy I was! I slept all night, and this morning I am able to write to you. How glad I am that I prayed that my father might have his purgatory on earth! I have not asked this favor for any one else, not even for myself.

When the sad news of my father's death reached me, the Sisters and I were making a novena for him. I have found true sympathy in my dear Sisters, and the heart of a mother in Mother Theodore. I even fear she will go too far in asking public prayers for him. I have

told her that my father would blame her. (In community you know it is not well to make distinctions so marked.) I am sure you will approve of my doing this.

A few days later she wrote:

My poor heart is so full that I must still speak of our beloved absent one. Saturday evening my mind was so disturbed that I hardly knew what I said or felt, but after my little visit to the Blessed Sacrament, I, like you, felt a desire to profit by our sorrow to advance in virtue. This morning I asked myself, How did my father assist at Mass? He closed the eyes of his body and those of his soul to all distractions; and I did the same. Then I said to myself, the duties of his state of life were his cherished duties, and, therefore, I shall go with courage and give my lessons. I must walk straight, now that he sees all my actions. How I shall love to pray to him, and to invoke him; especially for my brothers!

In a letter to her sister Cecile she tells a beautiful thing about their dear departed:

Thank my mother for what she wrote concerning our beloved father. I shall now tell you something about him. When I returned from Lorette during my visit to Saint Servan, he said to me, "It seemed to me that Our Lord asked me how many drops of my blood I would be willing to give Him if each would save a soul. At first I gave him a few, then many; but at last I said to him, 'Lord, take all, even to the last drop.'" The first drop of blood that my father gave for the salvation of souls was when he consented to my departure. Remember, dearest mother, he would have given the last drop, his life itself. My beloved sisters, my cherished brothers, let us love God as our saintly father loved Him; let us love Him, were it possible, even as this good God loves us.

To the same sister she wrote again:

. . . The dreams of the future are of no more value than the memories of the past, unless it is toward the eternal regions that our imagination carries us. O beautiful abode of heaven! We can think of you without illusion, for you are our true country. To see God, Cecile!—could my father ever have suffered too much for such a favor as this? What are a few hours of darkness compared to that eternity of light in which he now finds delight? He offered his sacrifice to Jesus crucified. He suffered with Him, and our Savior has for souls in their agony consolations unknown in other circumstances of life. How he would scold us—this dear father—if we regretted his sufferings, now forever past! My mother weeps under the trees that shade his grave, and we weep near the altar whereon our Savior dwells. On the 8th of April we offered our Holy Communion for him, and in the Heart of Jesus we found the father He had taken from us. All the souls of the Saints are in Him as in a tabernacle. Elvire and I often say to each other: "People think they have made a great sacrifice in giving themselves to God; but what have we left? Those who will leave us, those whom death and absence daily take from us, and whom we shall find again in God who is eternal. When shall we be in that beautiful country *ubi neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra?*

To Her Mother

Let us bless the Lord for all His benefits!

June 3, 1852.

My so-much-loved Mother: "Out of the depths I have cried unto Thee, O Lord." Last night Mother Theodore and I had just come to this passage in our Office. The evening was calm and tranquil, the moonbeams glittered through the branches of the trees in our forests. The carriage in which we were riding was crossing the first bridge on the way from Terre Haute when I noticed that the horse was backing. I jumped out immediately and saw that only a few inches of plank sep-

arated the wheels of the carriage from the ravine below. "Mother, Mother!" I cried out, "jump out!" She tried to do so but it was too late. In a second, carriage, horse, Mother—all had disappeared down the precipice, and I was alone on the bridge crying, "O Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, come, save our Mother!" I descended into the ravine and saw the horse on his back, the carriage upside down, and between the wheels and the horse's feet our dear Mother's head. But she was still alive and asked me to call for help. I expected it only from heaven. I had not noticed that there was a wagon about a hundred paces off. I ran, called, and the young man from the wagon came at once, though to me the time seemed very long. A single movement of the horse would have killed Mother. How I clasped her in my arms when she was half out from under the carriage! She had to show me the danger I was running of getting between the legs of the horse which was still on its back. But how I thanked God, the Blessed Virgin, and Saint Joseph! Mother was as composed as if she were coming from the chapel, and it was not until twenty minutes after that she felt any emotion. When I was calling for help I offered Our Lord at least one of Mother's limbs; but when the young man had raised the wheel up over her head I diminished my offering, and cried, "My God, my God, take the horse!" But we had no need even of a ram to redeem our dear victim; the carriage alone and my veil have paid for all. Why and how I jumped out upon the bridge I do not know, for I did not foresee the danger; but I knew the horse was a vicious one, and that Mother feared nothing so much as a horse that backs. It was on her account I jumped out of the carriage, but as I laughingly told her, it was myself that I saved. If both of us had fallen it is probable one would have been killed, for between the wheels there was room only for Mother's head. How I thanked God for having spared her the suffering I endured on her account! She would never have believed I could live through it. You prayed for her that day—it was the first Friday of the month—and God

heard your desires and preserved for our community and to our family a Mother and a friend. Will you be kind enough to have a Mass of thanksgiving offered, either at Lorette or Nazareth, in remembrance of Our Lord's protection?

You would shudder could you but see the spot where this distressing yet consoling accident occurred. I shall not attempt to describe the bridge, which has no parapet, etc.; but persons who next day saw the débris of our carriage could not understand how Mother Theodore was not killed, after falling from such a height. Oh! we have in Jesus in the Tabernacle a source of help of which they know nothing. If in temptation I should pray as I did then, never should I sin. What confidence I had! Mother Theodore told me that when the young man came up I exclaimed in French, "Our Lord in the blessed Eucharist has saved Mother!" I do not know what I said. It was nearly eleven o'clock at night when we arrived at Providence [the Convent]. Mother is still much bruised from the fall. I myself was a little hurt in jumping, but that is nothing, and to prove my gratitude to God I am going to try to be very good and not lose one moment of time. Yesterday morning I had said Madame Elizabeth's prayer, "O my God, I know not what will happen to me to-day, etc.," and I have said it since in union with you, my beloved mother. We never know what happens at a distance. Sometimes while you shed tears I am laughing, and when you are laughing, I am weeping; but, tears or joys, let all be for our Divine Savior. To-day, the feast of the Blessed Sacrament, I have prayed for all of you, for it is a day to ask all and to receive all.

I am glad to know that Eugene intends to be a member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. I made a novena for this dear brother during the month of May.

Sister Saint Francis kept up a correspondence with Monsieur Dupont of Tours. Her letters, unfortunately, have not been recovered, but we think it will be

a pleasure to our readers to peruse a letter from him, so faithful a friend of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. He was the first one to give an alms to Sister Saint Francis for her mission of Vincennes. This donation, which so rejoiced and touched the heart of the young missionary religious, was but the beginning of the alms of every kind that the "Holy Man of Tours" was later to bestow upon his humble protégées.

Tours, September 7, 1852.

My dear Sister: The bell for the first Vespers of the Blessed Virgin's Nativity is ringing as I begin this letter. So then, *Vive Marie!* If loving hearts in former ages used this salutation, how much more should we raise our voices to sing the praises and to recount the benefits of our good Mother! She has done so much for us! Does she not multiply her acts of kindness in order to gain hearts? How much, then, are they to be pitied who, like children badly brought up, refuse her maternal care!

To-night at the nocturnal adoration we shall talk about Mary so as to dispose ourselves to render true homage to her Divine Son exposed in the Sacrament of His love. During the entire night the adorers, before going to the chapel, will prostrate themselves at the feet of Our Lady to ask the grace of acquitting themselves worthily of their pious duties. They are engaged, as you know, in the work of reparation for the outrages committed against our Savior in the Blessed Sacrament. Mass is said at four o'clock. The Gospel will conduct us to the cradle of the daughter of Anne and Joachim. The angels of the new covenant, at the first cry of this daughter of David, took their way to Nazareth. Was it not meet they should hasten to salute her who was soon to be their queen? Did they not, near her cradle, prelude the concerts of Bethlehem? It is true it is not said they did, but all the mysteries of this joyful feast are not known. According to the Gospel, Mary *kept all these things in her heart,* and we may well believe

that Joachim and Anne did not reveal all that happened at the birth of this holy child, this Immaculate One, whom they received into their blessed hands.

You will find in the packet sent you by your dear cousin, Mademoiselle de la Valette, some water of La Salette and also a small vial of oil from the lamp which since Ash Wednesday, 1851, has constantly burned before the Holy Face. As time forbids me, Mademoiselle Henriette will give you some details on this subject.

Our Lord always multiplying His mercies, even overwhelms old Europe, culpable as it is, with His benefits. There is strong evidence that the triumph of the Church will not be delayed. It is impossible that the present deluge of graces should not revive at least as many men as there were criminals destroyed by the waters of the deluge in the time of Noah. In Our Lord, and at the feet of the infant Mary, believe me, my dear Sister,

Your very devoted servant,

DUPONT.

CHAPTER XIV

VOCATION OF MADEMOISELLE ELVIRE LE FER DE LA MOTTE

LIKE many other religious, Sister Saint Francis might, perhaps, be reproached for wishing to draw young persons to embrace the same kind of life which she herself had chosen. Without pretending to excuse her, it can yet be said that her desire of procuring the glory of God made her wish to see increased the number of workmen capable of reaping the rich harvest extending around her. Then, too, generous souls cannot possess a treasure without wishing to share it with others, and Irma was so happy in her vocation that she wished to procure the same felicity for those she loved. If God had given her sisters Cecile and Clementine an attraction to the religious life, He would certainly have granted one of her most ardent desires; but she would never have thought of drawing them to America, contrary to the designs of God. She often spoke to her family of the necessity of increasing the number of missionary Sisters. Once she wrote:

Although new establishments are continually offered to us, we are obliged to refuse them. This goes right to my heart. We all have at least one-third more work than time. When I see in spirit so many persons in France occupied with mere trifles, and when I recall the years I passed in the same way, I sigh deeply. Pray that the good God will send us subjects chosen by Himself and suitable for His work, because the harvest is ripe and only needs laborers. The Bishop of New Or-

leans has asked us to establish houses in two cities of his diocese, but we have not subjects enough to supply the wants even of Indiana.

The development of the West is also mentioned again, together with some little domestic events that seemed so wonderful to a foreigner.

Emigration is increasing rapidly. Hundreds of Irish and Germans arrive almost daily. We are asked for on all sides. If we to-day had sixty more Sisters to-morrow they would all be employed. At our Academy we have eighty-four pupils. We had difficulty in supplying them with beds. Our forty-eight sheep have been sheared, and the Sisters are now picking geese. There are many inventions in a new country.

All the letters of Sister Saint Francis Xavier are filled with the expression of her happiness and with sentiments of gratitude. "My time is well taken up," she wrote to her mother; "and, though I do not do great things, I am never idle. I fear sometimes my happiness is too great for a religious. How truly verified are Our Lord's words promising a hundredfold in this world to those who leave all to follow Him! When I obeyed His call I hardly thought of this hundredfold, which seemed impossible; but He who is all love is also all power. There are secrets for the soul which can be known only when tasted. He is for your child a brother, a friend, a country. Shall I say more? He is a mother, yes, a mother most tender."

To cite the passages in which Irma speaks of her happiness would be to multiply them beyond the limits of this work. So frequently do they recur that we are obliged rather to omit them. If Sister Saint Francis Xavier desired earnestly to see the number of the Sisters increased, still nothing alarmed her more than the

thought of admitting at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods young girls who did not have a true vocation.

To her sister Eugenie she wrote:

We are greatly in need of subjects, but we want those that are solid. Ask Saint Joseph to obtain for us this favor, that Bishop de Saint Palais will not bring us any who have not a real vocation. I fear he will meet with young persons of enthusiastic temperament who, though not truly called, would nevertheless like to come. I hope God will preserve us from such a misfortune; but we are running a risk. You must not think my opinion about admitting the poor among us has changed. Far from it; I have never hesitated to give my vote for a virtuous person, though she had neither a cent nor a stitch of her own. But we have discovered so many false vocations, so many prompted by convenience or necessity, that we are more cautious now, particularly in the case of persons from a distant country who have not the means of returning.

To her sister Pepa, whom she loved very tenderly, and who expressed at times the desire of giving herself to God, she wrote:

I do not remember telling you that the desire *alone* suffices. If that were so, you would have an excellent vocation; but I have never thought you were called to the religious life. Not only do we desire subjects having a good vocation, but we consider it necessary that that vocation be proved by good works.

She wrote again to the same sister, speaking of one of her friends, who was a religious:

Often I dream of seeing X—— back among her family, and I say to her: "How can you remain so long away from your community?" She replies: "And who gave you permission, Irma, to leave yours?" I look at myself, and, seeing that I am dressed as a secular, I give

a scream of despair. These are my bad dreams, or, as uncle calls them, my good dreams, because when I awake I rejoice to find them unreal. Sometimes also I dream that you, too, wear the religious Habit, but I tell you in confidence I feel ashamed of your worldly manner; and when morning comes I am glad to know you are at home. Yes, my dear Pepa, you will be the Philothea of Saint Francis de Sales. You can be as perfect in the world as many religious are in the cloister. You will take care of our beloved parents in their old age, and you will gladden the family in the afflictions God will send them; for we must know that crosses await us, and these dear crosses must be received lovingly.

The designs of God are not those of man. The Divine Master inspired neither Cecile nor Clementine with the idea of giving herself to Him, but He chose for Himself the fifth daughter of Monsieur and Madame le Fer, Elvire, of whom Sister Saint Francis had never thought. Elvire was then twenty-six years of age. As lovable, as brilliant and graceful as her sister Irma, she had much more ability for government and greater aptitude for the various feminine accomplishments which hold a place of importance in a boarding school for young women. For many years she had thought of consecrating herself to God, but she was undecided as to the religious congregation she should enter, though she was inclined to the Little Sisters of the Poor. She made known her intention to Sister Saint Francis in 1851, and thenceforward, while still forming a part of the family circle, applied herself to the practice of the virtues which make the true religious.

Irma responded to these overtures of vocation in her own disinterested way:

After Communion [she says] when in silence before Jesus, ask Him to make known what He wills you to

do; and if He asks the sacrifice of all that you love, tell Him to take your heart, if you have not the courage to give it to Him.

I should be very sorry if you thought of coming to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods on my account. If God calls you to the holy vocation of the missions, you will find in Mother Theodore a guide and a sincere friend; but neither for her nor for me should you make such a sacrifice. Never for one moment have I repented leaving France, but I left it for God, and I have found in this far-off land, the good Savior who called me.

It was only after long reflection, fervent prayers, and consultations with her director, Abbé Collet, vicar of Saint Servan, that Elvire decided to go to America. The desire of being with her sister and Mother Theodore entered but slightly into her determination. But seeing that in France, even in the world, there were many generous and devoted women who consecrated a portion of their time to good works, while in Indiana the religious alone took care of the poor, gave religious instruction to the children, etc., she concluded that in Indiana her life would be more usefully employed for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Not to grieve her family in advance, she did not disclose her project until the time arrived for its execution.

It was just at this time, and before she had made known her intention, that the death of Monsieur le Fer occurred. Elvire, in mourning over her good father, rejoiced that she had not afflicted him by the announcement of her approaching departure. She was uncertain, though, whether at the moment when God was sending her mother so deep a sorrow, she ought, instead of comforting her, to impose a new sacrifice by asking permission to leave her forever. She might, perhaps, have delayed, had not God sent to France Bishop de Saint

Palais. The interests of his mission called him to Brittany; he wished also to see the family of Sister Saint Francis Xavier. Elvire profited by the few days he spent at her mother's to make known to him her desire of consecrating herself to God in the work of the missions. It was agreed that, if Madame le Fer consented, she would in September meet Bishop de Saint Palais at Rennes, in órder to make the journey under his protection.

In the meantime Irma wrote to Abbé Collet, Elvire's director:

God has asked a great sacrifice of us. No doubt our beloved father is thanking God for the honor He confers on His daughter in choosing her for His spouse. But I must raise my thoughts above human prudence to adore and bless, without comprehending, the ways of our Divine Master. He will not permit the death of my father to retard or in any manner prevent Elvire's sacrifice. By means of grief He Himself prepares the heart He already possesses; my mother may weep, but she will not hesitate. Would that I could take to myself all the bitterness of this separation!

Bishop de Saint Palais will soon be at Saint Servan. He already has some young persons at Ruillé destined for the missions. We think it better for Elvire to remain with my mother until the time of his Lordship's departure for America. It seems to me God will not be displeased at her remaining with her afflicted family as long as possible. At home she can learn different styles of painting and other kinds of work which will be very useful here; and she can there learn especially how God is served, how His holy will is blessed in the midst of the sharpest trials. Our lonely forests will one day be inhabited by families to whom she will have taught the name of Jesus. She will make the Divine Master known and loved in a diocese which has for its patron

one of the most zealous of the Society of Jesus, the great Saint Xavier, who gained for God fifty-two kingdoms and baptized thousands of infidels. Though we have not his arm, this is at the Gesu at Rome, we have a fine painting which represents him with the cross he so much loved. She will pray to him for you, for he is also your holy patron, and, besides, it seems to me that you are the friend, not only of all my family, but also of our entire community.

It is impossible to express in words my gratitude to you. You have given me a Sister, you have given Jesus a dearly-loved spouse. You kept her for Him, even when she almost feared to belong to Him. Oh! how I thank you for thus guarding her heart for our Divine Savior! I join you together in my thoughts, because it was you who made the scales fall from the eyes of her who had said with all her heart, yet with a trembling voice, "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

Madame le Fer showed no less generosity in parting with this second daughter than she had manifested when offering her first to the missions. It is true that at the moment when God took from her the dearest object of her affections, she naturally wished to keep near her all her children, in order that they might, as far as possible, fill the void left by the loss of her husband; and, too, she wanted to keep Elvire at least one year longer. But her daughter's health had already suffered much on account of the conflicts she had sustained while forming the resolution of leaving her native land and her family; and now to defer her departure would mean only a prolonging of Elvire's anguish. Moreover, the advantage of making the voyage with the Bishop of Vincennes would not be offered again a year later. Madame le Fer de la Motte, therefore, resigned herself to make at once the sacrifice God asked of her, a sacrifice of which He only could measure the extent; because Elvire, by

her sweet disposition and her constant devotedness, had in some sort replaced, without causing to be forgotten, that other daughter exiled, yet always dear to her heart.

To her sister Eugenie, Irma wrote:

At last I have told the good tidings to our community. Tears of joy were shed, and postulants and novices clapped their hands with delight. All, I am sure, will love Elvire, my dear Elvire. I was greatly pleased with her letter. Prayers and sighs ascend here daily to heaven; and God who is so good, will certainly make my mother consent to her departure. Good Abbé Cardonnet often used to tell me that God turns as He will the hearts of men. Oh, let us have confidence! . . .

In her next letter Irma describes their concern at Saint Mary's regarding their prospective postulant:

I have told Elvire the fright she gave Mother Theodore. On opening her letter Mother's eyes fell on the word "cloister." Without reading further, she entered my room in great consternation and said, "Elvire tells me she is going to enter a cloistered community. What do you think of that, Sister Saint Francis? You make no reply?" "Our Lord knows what is best for her," I said; "I have confided Elvire to Him." The blow would have been severe for me, but I believe it would have been more painful for Mother Theodore. O my beloved Eugenie, think of the good that Elvire will do here; and then to belong to Jesus, to Him only! Oh, how sweet it is! Many times I have desired to write her these words of the Sacred Scripture: *Forget thy people and thy father's house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty;* but, fearing to influence her, I abandoned all to Jesus.

To Her Sister Eugenie

August, 1852.

Will Elvire be with you when you receive this letter? Poor child, how often I have thought of you both. We

have learned that Monseigneur is to be in Vincennes on October sixth. To be sure of arriving on that day he would have to take a steamboat, and if he does that, this little letter may arrive before he starts. I have prayed much for our beloved mother. I feel sure God has given her the courage to make her sacrifice and that she has even been consoled in making it. I share the opinion of the little doctor, "Sweet and bitter is the cup prepared by Our Lord." Ah! cherished mother, rejoice that your name is written, is graven in heaven. Yes, your sufferings yet more than your virtues assure me of your salvation. And you, beloved Cecile, take courage, courage to see tears flowing, courage to live far from the roof of the old home. Remember Sarah, the wife of the young Tobias, and Rebecca; they, too, suffered at leaving their parents. Dear Pepa, I wish I could embrace you, smile at you, tell you with all my heart how pleased I am with your courage, for I am sure that you have acted bravely. I shall write to dear Frederic, so truly his father's son and who suffers so much at being separated from you. And you, my Clementine, child of my soul, are you perfectly resigned? You know I never forget you.

My most dear ones at Lorette, aunts and cousins, encourage my mother, or rather pray for her that she may persevere in the way in which Our Lord is making her walk, I had almost said, fly. You, too, have your own great share in Elvire's sacrifice; you will share, too, in her labors. Dear brothers, you especially my Paul, imitate the example of so many virtues, and say with a good heart, "O my God, may Your Will be done!" Good-by, my Eugenie. All yours in Him who afflicts and consoles.

Irma, supposing her sister on the way to America, offers her mother the most powerful religious consolation to strengthen her sorely-tried soul:

To Her Mother

September 14, 1852.

My beloved and afflicted Mother: I should like to tell you all that I felt in reading your letter, but for that my heart would have to take the place of my hand. I have thought of all your grief, and I have shuddered in thinking of it. Though I should wish to have borne it all for you, yet I am to rejoice while you are in tears. This thought simply overwhelms me. I would prefer a thousand times to be without consolation than to deprive you of it; I would even give you what comfort God gives me; but no, I must be the cause of your sufferings. Yet I know you will rejoice at our joy, for you are no less generous than your daughters.

It is a source of comfort to you, I know, that my father, with his enfeebled health and sensitive heart, did not have to make this sacrifice. But now he is happy over the choice which would afflict him sorely, were he still on earth. He deems Elvire most fortunate in being called to follow Our Lord. Our dear father sees all the beauty, the riches, the lovableness of Jesus. He, dear mother, sees holy religious surrounded by the children they have instructed and to whom they owe their crown. He sees these dear religious looking at their mothers with love and gratitude, for they owe their unspeakable glory to their virtuous parents, who taught them to know God and later consented to their departure. Like Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, they have joined their sacrifice to that of their children. Oh! the tears of mothers are the precious seeds which engender souls for God. They are as the blood of the martyrs in forming Christians. I can hardly speak to you of any other subject. I see so many graces attached to your sacrifice, so many favors for my brothers, so many children and young girls who in our Indiana will owe their salvation to your sorrows. O my happy mother! What have you done, what have we done, that God should associate us with Himself in the work of the redemption of the world?

How does Cecile behave? I fear she is wanting in courage. I love my new brother. I embrace him, and his dear little wife, our charming Natalia. Assure her that our bishop is perfectly guiltless of Elvire's departure. God has done it all.

Our little boys have knit you a pair of stockings, and they pray with all their hearts for *their grandmother.*

CHAPTER XV

ELVIRE'S ARRIVAL AT SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

TOWARDS the end of September, 1852, Mademoiselle Elvire le Fer, and several other young ladies destined for the missions, embarked at Havre with Bishop de Saint Palais. Her courage equaled her sister's, perhaps surpassed it; for, unlike Irma, she was not endowed with an active imagination which embellishes every sacrifice and clothes the future in radiant tints. Besides, her call to the religious life had not encountered the contradictions which had been so great an impetus to Irma's vocation. The greatest grief for Sister Saint Francis would have been not to go to Vincennes; Elvire's sacrifice was doubled by regret at leaving France. The evil spirit, too, who never loses an occasion of tempting us, and who thus often gives us the means of enriching ourselves, tried everything at Havre to inspire Elvire with fear of her new destination and to present the future under the darkest colors. She herself declared that she blessed the seasickness which rendered her oblivious of the sadness and anguish that tortured her and deprived her of the faculty of thinking. By the time the winds were appeased and the boat had resumed a tranquil course, Elvire had recovered that profound calm and happiness which results from a sacrifice accomplished, and especially from a vocation followed. Fourteen years afterwards, 1866, when she returned to France to regulate with Mother Mary at Ruillé some affairs concerning their house in Indiana, she spent several months there and passed some time also

with her family. One day her aged mother, who was very ill at that time, said to her: "My child, no doubt you have become attached to France again, and you will feel a new rending of the heart in returning to your exile." "My dear mother," she answered firmly, "I will speak frankly, having no fear that my response will pain you, my heart is *all* beyond the sea. I rejoice at the thought of seeing again my community, Indiana, my Sisters, and my novices.[1] My mind is unceasingly occupied with their interests, and were I now to remain in France I should be a true *exile.*" Sister Saint Francis related that she herself had assisted at her own departure for America as though it were the leave-taking of another, and we insert here a page omitted earlier in this narrative:

To Madame le Fer

You must know, my dear mother, that it is not *I* that have left you, that have broken ties stronger than life. Never should I have been able to leave you and, because I could not do it, God has done it for me. I was merely a spectator of these marvels, and I am lost in wonder at the power of God, for my soul experienced the same effects the martyrs discovered in their bodies: the sensation of suffering was taken away. I did not dare to say it to you, for I feared you would think me indifferent. But God, who wished to let me know that this grace came from Him, left me to my weakness when I parted from Charles. The truth is, that a few hours earlier I had had some thoughts of presumption on account of my courage, and I deserved chastisement. God left me also to my grief when I quitted Brest, where I had few acquaintances, though He enabled me to leave Ruillé without shedding a tear, in spite of my tender love for our superiors there. You and many others have given me credit for courage that came from

[1] Sister Mary Joseph le Fer de la Motte succeeded Irma as Mistress of Novices.

God alone. I am naturally the most miserable of beings; the good God knows it, and it is for this reason that He takes so much care of me, because He did not come for souls that are strong.

These words addressed to a mother are significant, and it may easily be concluded that Irma's departure was accomplished with supernatural joy.

The succeeding letters relate the arrival of Elvire at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and the joy of Irma and of the postulants and Sisters at seeing her among them. Irma tries to console her poor mother with all the ingenuity that filial tenderness can suggest. Let us listen to her and we shall learn what a loving heart can invent and write:

To Her Mother

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana,
October 19, 1852.

To-morrow!—O my mother! thank God with me. Is it too much to ask of you? No, you will have courage enough to thank our good God for having led Elvire here. To-morrow, yes, to-morrow evening, this dear child will be with me. I could hardly sleep last night, so occupied was my heart with the thought of her. I said to myself, With what impatience must not the saints and angels wait for us! I thought of my father, who knew so well the dangers that surround us; how happy he will be when we reach the port! Never before have I so well understood the joy of the saints at the arrival of the blessed in heaven. I seem to be about to introduce Elvire into the house of God, into the company of the elect. Ah! my mother, I am so happy to-day, and yet we are only in the portico of the house of the Lord; we have not entered into that sanctuary which was not built by the hand of man; we can yet be lost! But he, our cherished father, is in heaven, and he has found his mother and all those whom he loved. The more I think about my father, the more my soul is filled with grati-

tude, I should even say, with happiness. His presence has increased the joy of those who preceded him, for their felicity can receive an increase. I say to myself, Elvire was not necessary for my happiness, yet she augments it; thus we shall do for our friends in heaven.

Yes, my mother, let us raise our eyes to heaven, *our home* for eternity. During our exile our home is the tabernacle, the house of our Father, our Brother, our Spouse. Oh! how I prayed for you during our retreat, how I asked Jesus for His love! With that we have all. I have never once asked that you would not go to purgatory, because my weakness rather than yours makes me apprehend sufferings for you. But what are a few hours' absence on earth compared with absence from God? And in purgatory we shall be separated from Him. I am ashamed, indeed, of my want of courage.

When I received a telegram on the eleventh announcing the arrival of the ship in New York, I was overjoyed. As we were saying Vespers I continued to the end, and then in a voice trembling with emotion I said aloud, "Let us recite a *Pater and Ave* to thank God for the arrival of our bishop in New York." The response to the prayers revealed a feeling like my own, and the eyes of more than one Sister were moist with tears. We then went to "Our Lady of the Valley" (at the laundry) to tell our Sisters the good news. There we thanked the Blessed Virgin. How I miss Mother Theodore! We should have embraced each other so tenderly; but another and better consolation was reserved for her, that of going to meet Elvire. Dear Elvire! She arrived on the feast of Saint Francis Borgia. How do you like the name of Borgia? I had selected Mary Eustelle for her, but Mother Theodore wants her called Ligouri. Perhaps the bishop has already given her a name. Regarding this future name Mother Theodore and I have been like our own family before the birth of Clementine, whom poor dear Uncle de la Motte wished to name Esther, so that he could say to her, "Come to your old Uncle Mardochai."

October 20.

To-day, my mother, after eleven years' absence, I shall see my cherished sister! Oh! may I be for her a model and a support; but, alas! I am far from being able to say with Saint Paul, *Be ye imitators of me, as I also am of Christ.* Ask this for me, for you know by experience how great is the force of example.

This afternoon I shall go to Terre Haute to meet our new family. Madame Piquet has already arrived. She is a charming lady, and I am glad Elvire traveled with her. Yesterday the postulants prepared five beds for their future companions, and they took care to put on Elvire's the blanket you sent me and the linen having my mark. They find it hard to study, so anxious are they to see their new Sisters. It was only four days before the arrival of the steamer that I knew from a letter written by Bishop de Saint Palais that Elvire was really coming. Until then Mother Theodore and I made frequent acts of confidence and resignation, even while reading the bishop's letter, for it was only in the postscript that he said, "I have just received news from Saint Servan; all is arranged; Mademoiselle Elvire le Fer will come."

October 22.

At last I have seen her and embraced her. My mother! I did not recognize her countenance, but how soon I recognized her heart. It was the family—whole, entire. Dear Mother Mary had written me, "You will find it in Elvire." And I did; or rather I have never lost it, for it is imprinted in the depths of my soul—this dear family—it is engraved there; but Elvire is the frame wherein those beloved beings seem to live and speak. Father Corbe and the Sisters all think her charming, and old Sister Olympiade has become ten years younger. I am afraid we shall spoil the dear child. After a week I shall write to you again, or rather to Lorette, for you all must have very sorrowful hearts. I shall write to all. Thank you, thank you, my mother, for consenting to send us your treasure.

Three days later Irma added:

You would be pleased to see our new companion—Elvire. She is quite rested now from the fatigues of her journey. She eats like a wolf and says she does not dare give herself time to take out her handkerchief at dessert for fear Mother Theodore would think her finished and raise her famous knife as the signal for grace. She amuses us by her *naïveté* and does many things in the wrong way. When I undertake to set her right she tells me that Mother has given her full liberty for a week and that she is not to be *scolded* till after that time.

She says she is always going to be one of the first at the chapel, for she noticed that the good Irish, when they come on feast days, plunge their head and hands into the holy-water font and do not leave a drop, and she wishes to have holy water to prevent distractions as much as possible.

I am going to tell my family to write to her often. She is already famishing for news. I tell her all I know, but, like our separated brethren, she prefers Scripture to Tradition. As for myself, I feel that I can now get along without letters. Elvire, like an evening breeze, has brought the fragrance of my native land to the home of my exile. She has come, laden with a thousand kisses, a thousand marks of affection from relatives and friends. My heart cannot express its gratitude to God for myself and for my sister, for the happiness of a religious vocation prevails over every other feeling, and Elvire is here to share it and the hundredfold! . . .

Oh, how she already loves Mother Theodore! She would indeed discover alone all her perfections, but I am only too happy to help her. I point them out in a whisper, however, for if this dear Mother were to hear me, she would say, as she does when reading my letters, "Sister Saint Francis, may God forgive you all your lies!"

Mother Theodore added some lines to Madame le

Fer about the arrival of Elvire at Saint-Mary-of-the Woods:

Nov. 2, 1852.

Madame, my very dear friend, the mother of my two beloved daughters, what shall I say to you, what shall I write? It would be very sweet for me to be able to console you, but it is not given to man to heal the wounds of your heart, so good, so loving, so sensitive. God alone can console you, strengthen you; He alone could give you the courage to overcome nature, and to make all the sacrifices He has required of you this year —for what a year for poor nature! But above all, what a year for grace! Only in heaven will you understand the treasure with which your soul has been enriched during these months. . . . To pray for you is a necessity for me; but I am so occupied with what they call business, that my prayers are very poor, very miserable; there are others who pray better than I do, and who frequently during the day, at the foot of the altar of our poor little Chapel of the Woods, pray for a mother whom they cherish tenderly and whom they have left only for God, for God alone.

You already know that I went to New York [1] for our dear Elvire! Oh! how happy I was to embrace her, in offering for the first time with her my thanks to God! Some days later we were at Terre Haute, where our dear and beloved Sister Saint Francis awaited us. . . . The presence of Mademoiselle Elvire has given, as it were, a new life to Irma. She is well for her, though she has a cold. I appointed Elvire her superior to take care of her; fancy how she acquits herself of her task. At New York Elvire made me very uneasy about her health. She coughed much, especially in the morning. Thank God, the cough has entirely left her, and the dear child is well, yes, well in every respect. She has an angelic countenance and, what is more remarkable in my opinion, with all her fine qualities she is charmingly

[1] The Bishop requested Mother Theodore to meet him at New York, that together they might consult some architects before beginning the new Mother House at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.—Ed.

simple. Every one loves her already and looks upon her as an old friend, or rather as an old Sister. I believe she is called upon to do immense good in this portion of the Lord's vineyard that He gives us to cultivate; at least such is my hope. If it were otherwise, if God did not call her to the religious life, I would place her again in the arms of her mother. Let us beg God that He may deign to show us His Will, and let us promise to follow it with all our heart.

It is probable that we shall go to Vincennes this week. Monseigneur wants to show his asylums to Elvire and her companions; he is going to send for them one of these days. I shall accompany them if my health permits, for I cannot send Sister Saint Francis as the season is too far advanced. Elvire is in my room now with her guitar, near the fire. You seem to be with us. You will come, will you not? I have already selected a room for you in our new house; it is not ready for use yet, but I hope it will be next summer. I am very happy at what you tell me—that you prefer Elvire to be here with us than elsewhere. To justify this flattering preference, I have only a heart to love your dear daughters and I do love them, yes, very tenderly, and their mother too.

Irma must now pour balm into wounds she herself had inflicted. Her appreciation of the value of sufferings, borne in the spirit of loving resignation, was not always understood.

To her Aunt Marie, who had been somewhat offended at her desiring trials and sufferings for her grandmother and the other members of the family, she writes:

Well, my beloved godmother, are you still displeased with me? Oh! no; you will rejoice to-day when you hear these words, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Most favored, indeed, are we when Our Lord makes us shed tears which one day He will wipe away. The only regret I have for my grand-

mother is that she did not have more sufferings. I comfort myself, however, with the thought that her anxious mind afforded her unnumbered opportunities of making sacrifices. Our saintly Aunt Jeanne was always crucifying herself. Abbé Cardonnet was overwhelmed with humiliations and infirmities. Indeed, we should be ashamed to enter heaven with empty hands. Among our workmen is a good old man named Michel, who always considered himself the happiest man at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods until he became afflicted with cancer of the nose. Not long ago I said to him, "My good man, you would have been the only one of your kind in heaven, and you would have had to have a corner apart, for all the saints have suffered. But since you are now so afflicted that you can neither eat nor sleep, we shall make a novena for you to Our Lady of La Salette." Hardly had our prayers begun when old Michel recovered his peace and his usual happiness. He offered to God the sacrifice of his appearance and of his life; but the Blessed Virgin obtained for him a partial cure at the end of our novena. I should have been sorry to see our only male *singer* wanting in resignation, for he is an excellent man. He has cut all the stone for our new house *gratis pro Deo.* "I am only too happy," he said, "to do something for our Savior." He greatly admires Elvire, who, in turn, thinks him charming.

They wrote me that you are still, just as when I left you, always occupied about others; that my lovely sister Natalia, speaking of you, said in her imperfect French: "Good Aunt Marie *pinches*[1] at everybody." Try to sanctify your natural disposition of anticipating the wants of others; for you can acquire much merit before God, who rewards even a cup of cold water given in His name. We must derive profit from all things, and thus we shall enrich ourselves in our little *retail* business, making a fortune cent by cent.

Last evening they gave me a superb feast. You would be happy could you see how dearly they love me.

[1] Pronouncing pense (thinks) as if it were pince (pinches). *La bonne tante Marie pense à tout le monde.*

I say to myself, Dear Lord, how faithfully You keep Your word! You recompense, even in this world, those who have left all to follow You. . . . I thought when I left my family that I had left all the sweet joys of friendship, but Our Lord has given them to me, and still does so daily. Every year when the third of December comes, my gratitude redoubles; but this year, this year, Elvire is here to embrace me. Well, in order not to be ungrateful I must now be very good, very faithful.

At Benediction Elvire sang a hymn in honor of Saint Francis Xavier; later they had some verses, music, and flowers for me, and they made me a throne covered with my sister's cloak. As I grow older I become more like my grandmother; I was on the point of *asking for my little song* when they began to sing it. Sister Olympiade had improvised two or three which Elvire put to music; Father Corbe laughed heartily. This morning all the Communions were offered for me, also the Mass (for I know our good Father's habits). Mother Theodore was not the least of the happy ones; she rejoiced especially to see me in such good health; she was quite unlike one of our Sisters who wrote to me, "Why are you not still sick and I taking care of you? That was the happiest time of my life."

Yesterday in fancy I saw Saint Francis Xavier go to my father and with a smile say to him, "Well, Monsieur le Fer, are you not happy to have two of your daughters in my diocese of Vincennes? We must now pray for these children, that they may bring here with them a great many souls." Then my father bowed to Saint Francis, and together they went to petition Our Lord. Ah! my dear aunt, how happy they are in heaven! How can we regret that they have gone there?

Tell my cousin Charles de Kraoul that I owe to him one of my most consoling thoughts. Elvire told me that during my father's illness, the doctor having prescribed mutton [1] on a day when it could not be procured,

1 In 1852 Lent was still observed with such strictness at Saint Servan that during Holy Week a chop could not be procured except from a hotel in the neighboring city.

Charles de Kraoul offered to kill his boy's pet lamb. At this the tears came to my eyes; but later, when in the chapel, I said to myself: What! God has so loved us as to immolate His only Lamb, His only Son, that we might be healed by His blood, and can we, after this, doubt the love of such a Physician for his patients? O my cherished aunt! it seems to me that the greatest of all sins is distrust.

Sister Saint Francis profited by every circumstance to address words of consolation to her mother, and to soften as much as possible the sorrow felt by Madame le Fer for the departure of her daughter. On hearing of the visit of some French gentlemen to Henry V,[1] then in exile, she wrote:

Last night in my dreams I saw this *Dieudonné,* this dear prince given to France by God. All my royalist blood was roused, and I considered G—— most happy to have given a proof of fidelity to the proscribed king rather than to his king on the throne. Then, my mother, I thought that we, too, have our Sovereign in exile. Oh! how well He receives us when we visit Him. How He allows us to approach Him; how sweetly He looks upon us! He invites us to His table; He imparts to us His secrets. Others may acknowledge Him for their Lord when He comes in the glory of His Father, but for us, our happiness is to say to Him while He is in the prison of His love, "My God and my King!" My dearest mother, Our Lord can pardon us all our faults, He can give us a place in heaven for a single act of contrition made at the moment of death; but what He cannot give an absolved penitent is an assurance of fidelity. The grace of graces is to love Jesus Christ in His exile, and to prove our love for Him by our sacrifices, that so we may say to Him: "You have pardoned me, my Lord; this is much, yes, far more than I deserve; but You have done still more—You have allowed me to

[1] The Count of Chambord.

render you some little services; and while others salute the sovereigns who are contending for the world, I repose near You without desiring their favor."

If Henry V had asked Monsieur de G—— for one of his children; if he had said to him: "It is by your son I hope to reconquer my kingdom, which is dearer to me than life," would he have refused? Would he have shed tears daily over his absence? Would he have asked him back by his sighs? You know this kingdom so dear to Jesus, and do you not wish your Elvire to be the happy one *chosen* to conquer souls? I have no doubt that Our Lord pardons your weakness, but I do doubt very much whether in heaven you will pardon yourself, if before entering the realms of the Blessed you do not from the depths of your heart tell Jesus that you surrender to Him absolutely your treasure, your Elvire. But, my beloved mother, you have already done this. Your heart has combated, and the love of God has gained the victory. You mourn over the victim, but you would not take it back.

Not long ago, talking to our pupils of the joys of heaven, I told them how much it cost you to part with me, and I repeated your words, "It is for their happiness, for their salvation, that I give you up." I spoke to them then of your second sacrifice, adding that one day in heaven they would surround you and dry your tears and thank you. The scene was very touching, I assure you. In the evening all the pupils came to welcome Elvire.

We shall now see that Madame le Fer de la Motte took back nothing of the new sacrifice she had made to God. About this time she wrote to Mother Theodore:

I charge my beloved daughters to remind you of our day of contract [Friday] in honor of the Sacred Heart. On that day I unite with them in a special manner in the Heart of our Divine Savior to whom I have given them. Assure them I do not repent of what I have done. If sometimes a cloud obscures the beauty of the great sacri-

fice made to a God of love, His merciful hand is ever ready to drive it away. . . . I always take care of the flowers of my Irma's garden. I have transplanted a bunch of her forget-me-nots to Elvire's flower-bed. But it is not necessary that these little blue flowers my daughters loved so much should speak to me in their language, for in my heart there is a life of remembrance of these dear absent ones. I weep for them at Saint Servan, but I live with them. If I question them beyond the sea, they answer me. It is a bi-location of the heart, a mysterious power of maternal love, which mothers, by nature or by grace, alone can feel and understand.

Elvire's director and most true friend must have a letter from Sister Saint Francis Xavier:

To Monsieur l'Abbé Collet

I am sure that a little word about your dear child will give you pleasure, especially as this little word will tell you we have found in her all the good you had discovered and announced to us. Yes, my dear brother (permit me to address you thus), yes, God has given great favors to the soul of Elvire, and He has given us a precious gift in choosing this house for the theater of her virtues. She has not as yet, of course, the knowledge or the practice of the rules of a religious house, but she has everything required to appreciate and follow them. Her judgment is of admirable rectitude, her will possesses a strength which would remove mountains, and her heart is formed to understand the secrets of the love of Jesus and to compassionate the sufferings of others. What enhances in my eyes the gifts that Our Lord has bestowed upon her, is that He keeps them hidden from Elvire herself. She sees only her repugnance to good and counts for nothing an act of virtue made with effort. Poor child, she has had her cloudy days, and I may say that I shared them, for my heart wept when she shed tears. Our Lord, however, sus-

tained our courage. I cannot say as much of Mother Theodore who braves the waves of the ocean more calmly than she endures the sight of a tear from one of her daughters. She has never been able to bear seeing Elvire afflicted. I do not doubt that her prayers and yours have abridged the days of trial. Mother Theodore and Elvire love each other very much. God certainly inspired you when you confided your treasure to Mother Theodore. If I begin to speak of her, I shall never know when to finish. The longer I live with her, the more I thank God for having called me to be directed by her. The Jesuit Fathers who conduct our retreat each year have often told us that they wish for their missions, Sisters formed by Mother Theodore. Father Corbe appreciates her as they do and more. We are spoiled, are we not, in having the superiors we have? It seems that since Elvire's arrival Our Lord has been pleased to multiply our children. Never have we had so many pupils ask for baptism, never has the number of our boarders been so large. We intend to undertake a new good work as soon as our house is finished. This old house will be given up to the poor Catholic children of the country who are unable to attend the boarding school. We have four young girls already preparing for their Easter duties. One of them is nineteen years old and has not yet made her First Communion. They are accommodated in our dormitory; we are very much crowded, but that does not prevent our being gay and happy. I told Elvire that I thought it was due to our friends at the presbytery that God has been blessing our work so visibly. You pray for us every day at Saint Servan; you are our brothers, our aid, our hope. Perhaps one of you will be called to a post nearer to our Indiana. May the will of God be done! In it is our peace and our sanctification.

I do not forget Monsieur Dorin. He is also a member of the family of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Thanks to both of you for the good your visits do my mother and for what your prayers accomplish here.

A second letter to Abbé Collet is dated August 16, 1853:

A word, yes, a word of joy and happiness. Our child [Elvire, now Sister Mary Joseph] has received the Holy Habit; she has laid aside the garments of the world to clothe herself with the livery of Jesus poor and despised. You would have wept for joy to see her, so modest and pure, at the foot of the altar. I made an offering to God for you of this spiritual daughter. I offered her for my mother, for my sisters, for all those whom He has given me and who know how to appreciate so sublime a happiness. Indeed, to present such a victim was a precious favor. To-day as I beheld her under her veil I said to myself, Do I really see her with my own eyes? Mother Theodore was, I think, as happy as I. Father Corbe on seeing her in her new costume could only say, *"Pauvre Soeur Marie Joseph!"* The bishop thinks she resembles me still more since she has the Habit.

The other evening Elvire and I were speaking of those who are interested in our souls' welfare. I mentioned Abbé Cardonnet, and she her dear Abbé Collet. Both of you love us in God. I say "love us," for he who has gone has not ceased to love in the land of perfect love. There we have friends and brothers; how happy it makes us feel to know that we are loved! Elvire smiles when she hears me say, Abbé Collet would not do this or that. She says I speak of you as if I knew you. I reply that it never enters my mind that you are a stranger. I was unfortunate enough to begin to describe you—light hair somewhat curly, blue eyes, etc. When I was informed that my imagination had so badly pictured you, I was on my guard against portraying Abbé D——. After all, I said to her, this does not prevent me from being well acquainted with Abbé Collet; and if I make a mistake as to the features of his face I do not in the sentiments of his heart.

Various details about Sister Saint Francis and Sister Mary Joseph are now given by Mother Theodore:

Sister Mary Joseph
Elvire Le Fer de la Motte

Madame and dear Friend:

For several weeks our beloved daughters have been occupied in looking among our little nothings of Saint Mary's to find something that might please their beloved mother. I was also thinking about what I could put in the trunk. I could find nothing, nothing; at length a happy thought, suggested by Sister Mary Joseph, struck me like a ray of light. I shall send the daguerreotype of Sister Saint Francis. (I had promised this to myself a long time ago, but at length the time had come.) The trouble was to get it from her. For many weeks she was suffering from her summer smothering attacks. It was not easy to take her to Terre Haute in that state. A fine day now presented itself; it was not too warm; we might start. I had the horses hitched to the carriage. I invited Sister Saint Francis and Sister Mary Joseph to seat themselves in it, and lo! we were all three *en route,* speaking of the weather, admiring the beauty of our forests, the progress of the future railroad, etc., etc. At length I spoke of the portrait. What a shock! Imagine, if you can, all the objections made by our poor little daughter, and also the eloquence with which we opposed them. We made enough fuss to deafen the horses; however, we had not persuaded her, and we were already on the bridge over the Wabash. Finally we found the vein of persuasion by painting in lively colors the pleasure you would have in contemplating those cherished features, and in showing the likeness to everybody. We represented the family assembled at the opening of the package; we heard their cries of joy, the conversation which ensued, etc. At last the tears flowed, and the victory followed. Elvire quickly put the toilette in order. Now behold us in the room (sky-lighted), determined to have the picture. Our dear little daughter was charming and lent herself with good grace to all we wanted. The trip, our little dispute, and the walk from the carriage to the third story, had made her look beautiful. How I wish you could have seen her!

If Sister Mary Joseph had not left her likeness, I

should have sent hers also; I shall send it later in the religious Habit, when she shall have taken her vows, if I live. These two dear daughters are well. Both of them are my consolation and procure the glory of God, and will continue to do so in future. Sister Mary Joseph will speak English much better than Sister Saint Francis. I suppose these dear children give you all the news that can interest you.

Before the arrival of Elvire, I thought it was impossible for me to love any one as much as my first daughter, my dear Sister Saint Francis, and lo! now I blend the two in my affection. I might almost say that I feel something more tender and more demonstrative for the younger, and there is no jealousy on the part of the other. Sister Saint Francis says that Elvire and I resemble each other in disposition. I am quite proud of this, for I find many good qualities in the dear child; but I feel that I do not resemble her. If you could see how gracious she is, how she advances in the path of virtue, and how happy she is!

From time to time, however, her pure and serene countenance is slightly clouded, imperceptible to others, but perceptible to me. She has committed a little fault, or has been guilty of an imperfection in the fulfillment of her duty. I scold her, embrace her, and all is over. How happy I am to have your daughters, my dear friend! I am happy because they will do much for the glory of God. What has not our dear Sister Saint Francis done already! Elvire's time will come; she is preparing herself, and is laying a very solid foundation on which to raise the edifice of perfection. If you knew how much we love each other! It seems to me that the ties of holy friendship uniting us are stronger even than those of blood. The health of your dear Elvire is good. I do not think that any one, even you, Madame, her tender mother, can be more anxious to preserve her precious health than I am. Did you but know my hopes for the future in regard to this child of benediction! All here love and esteem her; it is impossible to know her and not to have these sentiments. You can imagine,

then, how happy Sister Saint Francis is to have her here.

In an early chapter we met the name of the most illustrious and beloved Bishop of Le Mans, Monseigneur Bouvier. The Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods looked upon him as their father. He was indeed their unfailing friend, their defender and protector. He understood Irma. When all prudence, all reason seemed cast to the winds, he uttered these decisive words: "I do not say that she will arrive at Vincennes, but I do say she must start." So highly did he esteem the virtue of the young novice that he volunteered to permit her to take perpetually binding vows before leaving for America. He also permitted her to take an extra vow of Consecration to the Blessed Sacrament. Irma tells of her immeasurable happiness on account of these favors in a letter previously quoted. We naturally look for an extensive correspondence between Le Mans and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. The only letters that have been recovered, some, mere fragments, are now presented.

To Monseigneur Bouvier, Bishop of Le Mans

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, February 28, 1843.

My Lord and Father,

I cannot express the joy that your most dear letter gave us all. One has to be more than two thousand leagues from her superiors to understand this, for the solitude in which we live is something more painful for the French than even misery. The faces here wear such a cold look! With an unknown language, snow for the past five months, around us an icy atmosphere, your remembrance of us, my Father, was like a sunbeam in the month of December. I offered a Communion to thank Our Lord for the tender care He takes of us. I say "tender," since He chose your paternal hand to relieve

us. Oh! sometimes it costs much to ask from strangers and to receive what they give with disdain. But I have made the vow of poverty, and the poor should not be proud.

I suppose our Mother has spoken to you about Mademoiselle Bernard.[1] I was so surprised at her resoluteness during the first days which she passed with us that I looked upon her nearly as a model of courage, abnegation, and of humility. I was the first to urge that she might be given a trial in the novitiate, knowing this would please his Lordship. Oh! I assure you I have done penance for it. Never had I come in contact with such a head! She is able to cure one forever of illusions. She takes all her reveries for realities, and assures us that you told her things one would never have thought of. She may probably do harm to the community, although she politely said: "Do not be uneasy; I have seen all, but I will not say anything." I do not know what she has seen, but it seems to me that the greatest abuse she could have remarked in our community is that such a subject was suffered to remain for so long a time. As in this, so in all other things, only what God wills, shall happen.

How happy we are to be the daughters of Providence! By It we are directed, and if it happens that we make a mistake while we believe we are doing right, it is Providence again that takes care to rectify our errors, teaching us at the same time to mistrust our own lights. The less we have of human aid, the more it seems does God watch over us, and in this desert where He has placed us, He Himself is our Moses, our Manna, and our Pillar of Light. I could not express to you the happiness my vocation gives me. It is not such as I had pictured it to myself in France, but much more pure, since it is nothing but humility, abandonment, and renunciation. O my Father, I thank you a thousand times for having sent me!

[1] Miss Bernard was a young woman who had been dismissed from a community in France. Mother Theodore, though very reluctantly, consented to give her a trial of the novitiate, at the instance of Sister Saint Francis Xavier whose motives are disclosed in the letter here given.

Never before have I found myself so favorably circumstanced for attaching myself solely to God. Monseigneur de la Hailandière is undeceived as to my pretended perfections; my ridiculous pronunciation of the English puts me out of danger of vanity with my companions; Mother Theodore's frequent illnesses prevent me from leaning upon her; in fine, my fervor has vanished with a large part of my interior consolation.

If one day you could come among us, you would see that your work is truly the work of God. Our American Sisters, born so proud, and so independent, submit with zeal to the least observances of our holy Rule. Among them are some endowed with great courage, and who serve God because it is right and reasonable to do so, but not because it is sweet to love Him. All have great love for their superiors in France, and would be very happy to know them.

I have collected for you various incidents relating to our mission. If I can write them out before your letters are sent, I will do so; if not, they will be for next month. I am so pleased when we receive news from Ruillé, that I thought you would be glad to hear something of our Indiana, which is now the battlefield of your children, and sometimes a field of victory. Whatever may be the issue of the combat, we shall have glorified God if we allow ourselves to be guided by His Providence, and we shall always bless Him for having inspired you to prolong our life of exile, which will assure us of the possession of our heavenly country, if we are faithful.

January 13, 1850.

We should be uneasy about your health, on account of the time which has elapsed since we had the consolation of receiving a letter from you, had we not learned from Father Corbe that your Lordship was at Rennes on the eleventh of November at the opening of the provincial council.

We are awaiting details of this interesting event, in the New Orleans paper. We are not yet dead to

France, and much less when there is question of affairs in which religion and our venerated Father of Le Mans are concerned. We hope that the Republic will not trouble our dear Congregation of Ruillé.

This dear community is certainly not influenced by the ideas of the present day, since, instead of changing their head when they could do so, they had recourse to authority in order to retain her. We, in union with our Sisters of France, thank you, my Lord, for having been willing to leave us our able guide. Poor Mother Mary! if she had received less from God, she would be happier and more quiet! But she prefers, I am sure, to enjoy less peace that others may have much more.

We have not had any difficulty in regard to the election of our Mother since Monseigneur de Saint Palais is bishop. When he was only a simple priest, he approved our refusal of an election, and always urged us to follow the advice of our superiors in France. The community looks upon Mother Theodore as foundress and enjoys in peace the advantage which her superiorship procures.

As for herself, I should be well pleased if she could be replaced in a few years; but we are until now so poor that I see no chance at all of rest for Mother Theodore. To give you an idea of our misery, you must know that they forced the Blessed Virgin to perform a miracle to prevent me from dying six weeks ago. You remember perhaps, my Father, what a weakly appearance I had when I had the consolation of consulting you about my vocation. Well! although I am twice as weak now as I was then, yet such as I am as to health, without counting the infirmities of soul, I am still found useful, and I own to you that I think like the others; for during my illness there was no one who could give the lessons to the postulants, and it was a real affliction for me to see these poor children without a mistress.

All our Sisters at the Academy have more work than they are able for. We need twice as many as we have. After all, we must not wish to be richer than the Lord

wants us to be. This work would be less His, if done by other instruments.

Our orphan asylum is doing very nicely. I hope it will continue to prosper. Bishop de Saint Palais is all heart for his little girls; he has had a pastoral letter published in their favor.

Our good Superior [1] Father Corbe is always with us. He accompanied Bishop de Saint Palais to the Council of Baltimore. All the bishops of America, who knew of our past difficulties, approved him for having upheld us, and assured him that they had no doubt of the success of our Congregation.

Last month Monseigneur Blanc, Bishop of New Orleans, wrote to Mother Theodore begging for some of our Sisters. We could not accept his proposal. Had he made it three years ago, we should no longer be in Indiana. God wants us in our poor forest.

The Bishop of Chicago, ex-provincial of the Jesuits of St. Louis, came to see us two months ago. He is our nearest neighbor; he is still poorer than we are in subjects and in furniture. His episcopal city offers him no resources, he has not even a servant to take care of him. When we went to Father Corbe's house to return his visit, he received us standing. "My Lord," I said, "are you not going to offer us a seat?" "Pardon me," he answered, smiling, "it is because I have the habit of receiving my company this way. Formerly I had two chairs in my parlor and a small trunk. When a gentleman and a lady came to see me, I offered a chair to the lady, I sat on the other, and the gentleman put himself on the trunk; but one of my chairs has disappeared, so I am obliged now to remain standing, as well as my company."

Mother made him a present of several pious objects for his Catholic children; he was much pleased with his visit. How happy should we be if we could receive a

1 During the difficulties that arose almost at the beginning between the Shepherd of the diocese and his flock, the bishop appointed Father Corbe Ecclesiastical Superior of the Sisters of Providence, an office he held from 1844 until his death in 1872. He is the only one that has ever borne this title, the Rule not providing for such an office.

visit from you! At least, my good Father, write a little oftener to your daughters on the other side of the seas. Repeat to us that you pray for us, that you love us much, that our success gives you joy. We know all this, it is true; we know the interest you bear us, yet it is always a new pleasure when we receive a letter from Le Mans.

March 18, 1851.

We pray earnestly to our Father, Saint Joseph, to send us subjects capable of glorifying God, and not to allow others to remain. To-morrow we shall redouble our prayers, and he will be compelled to listen to us, for he has charge of our Congregation. Two of our little orphans received the sacrament of Baptism a week ago. Bishop de Saint Palais was their godfather, and Mother Theodore, godmother of one who was named Mary Joseph.

Monseigneur hopes to be in France by the end of May, but he does not know if his affairs will be settled by that time.

I take advantage of the absence of our dear Mother Superior to inform you of what we did at our last retreat. You will now think that she will have no one in whom she can put her trust, if I join myself to the conspirators. I was very anxious to tell you of our little plot, but was obliged to wait, for if she had seen my letter, there would have been no more joy for her. Poor Mother! She has always flattered herself that we would let her go in peace, and that she would be soon relieved of her burden. For fear she should be seized with too strong a temptation on this score during the absence of Bishop de Saint Palais, we begged him to second our desires. I will copy the letter of his Lordship for you.

"My dear Daughters,

"Convinced, like yourselves, that the good of the Community demands that Mother Theodore, Foundress of the Sisters of Providence in Indiana,

should retain the superiorship during her lifetime, I accede to your desires, and confirm with all my heart the nomination made by his Lordship the Bishop of Le Mans."

We should like to know of the satisfaction our act will cause you, but have the goodness to write to Father Corbe, who is in the secret; it would be imprudent to speak of it to me, lest my letter should fall into the hands of our Mother. None but our Sister Councillors know about it.

I am asking of Almighty God one more favor for our community; it is that of having our Rules approved by the Pope. I hope that we shall obtain this favor for both our dear Houses of Ruillé and of Saint Mary's.

Our Sisters were so flattered, when I told them your Lordship had written to our Mother that your Congregation of Indiana was as dear to you as that of Ruillé. They exclaimed, "Could that be true? Do you not think it a mere compliment?" I answered that you would not write anything that you did not mean. Then I had to tell them whom you were like. "Oh! I am sure," said one of them, "that the Bishop of Le Mans resembles Bishop Bazin." I said you were good like him, but that your look was more serious. They always come back to the conclusion that you must come to see them; they would take fine care of you. I am satisfied with a happiness farther away, but more lasting. Let him who has put his hand to the plow not look back. No, not even to render the last duty to his father. This would be very hard if uttered by any other than by Him whose yoke is sweet and burden light.

May 22, 1852.

In this beautiful month of May, how many times have we not prayed for you! I am sure that more than once you also have asked for your daughters the grace they need, and that our good and powerful Mother has often had to open the treasures of her divine Son for us and for you. Prayer—that is our Post, our Telegraph, our surest means of communication.

We have the privilege of being the object of the hatred and contempt of our dissenting brethren. That is a good sign. If we were of this world the world would love its own. At Fort Wayne some weeks ago they undertook to sell at their fair Sisters of Providence. They dressed dolls in our costume, then made their faces like monsters. But they were not lucky. All the "Sisters" remained on their hands, and the following week, nine new pupils entered our school. And yet they had gone around to all the parents to forbid them, under pain of perdition, to send their children to the Sisters.

Our Academy was never so flourishing. We now have sixty pupils. Next Sunday, Pentecost, four will be baptized. Why are you not here, dear Father, to rejoice with us! But this year you have almost had a glimpse of your dear daughters, since our good bishop brought you an account of all our little affairs. He will go again and speak to you about us, and then he will come back and speak to us about you. We heartily wish that you could accompany him to Indiana; but as that is impossible, could you not, at least, entrust him with your portrait? It would be a present sweeter to our hearts than maple sugar is to the palate. Besides, you told us to ask for something in return for our little presents; so you are pledged now, my Lord. Two or three minutes of patience would be enough for a daguerreotype, and these few minutes of sacrifice would make us very happy.

When you see our good superiors of Ruillé, would you be so kind as to tell them that we are quite anxious to have the List of Obedience, and that we thank them beforehand for a souvenir to which, as Sister M. Ludovic says very well, another souvenir is attached; since it is the very list which our worthy bishop has held in his hands in our dear chapel of Ruillé. Oh! may you for a long while yet send out your daughters in the vineyard of our divine Master! God, in asking of me the sacrifice of my virtuous father a few days ago, leaves me the hope that He will preserve to us the Father of

my new family, the Guide, the Pastor of my dear Sisters of Providence.

Whenever I think of you I experience an increase of gratitude to God and also, to tell the whole truth, a sentiment mingled with uneasiness about your precious health; but I endeavor to replace it by confidence and prayer. May I beg of you some prayers for my beloved father? If you find me too bold, then I beg of you to leave me out of your *mementos* for some time, and to include my father. Ah! when shall we all be together there in that beautiful land where we shall have nothing else to say, but to thank! Oh! how I long for that blessed day when death will be no more, nor absence, nor sin which has caused them.

February 21, 1853.

It is a long time since we received news from you. Could it be that you are ill? It seems to me that our superiors of Ruillé would have informed us if such were the case. Perhaps your journey to Rome has given you extra occupation at your return; and you thought no doubt that your daughters of Indiana might wait a few weeks longer. We must confess to you the cause of our impatience. You went to Rome; as soon as Bishop de Saint Palais informed us of your journey we prayed, prayed much for its success. We thought that your Lordship would be willing to speak of our holy Rules, and that they would perhaps be approved. We begin to fear that they are not, since we receive no news, either from Le Mans or from Ruillé. Is the day which God has appointed for granting us this favor yet to be delayed? I earnestly hope, however, that you will again see our good Pope Pius IX, and that he will add to all his holy works that of the approbation of our Constitutions.

Mother Theodore has a great many things to engage her. She has been obliged nevertheless to relinquish some of her occupations this winter on account of her poor health. She has not had one of those alarming attacks which make us cry out *Parce Domine,* but for a

long time she has had a sort of fever, together with head and stomach trouble. She has appointed me her secretary to you, and while I am sorry for the cause, I rejoice in the consequences, at least for this time, for I must own that I am a poor writer on business matters. Mother has lost much by the death of our dear Sister Angelina, who wrote her business letters admirably well. I fear that Ruillé has to lament over the loss of a still more skillful hand; for Sister Angelina, being the music mistress, had never been named Secretary; and Sister Mary Ludovic was not only useful by her pen, but also by her counsel, her heart, and her mind. Bishop de Saint Palais spoke to us at length of good Bishop Bouvier, and of our dear Providence, which he would, I believe, willingly have chosen for his see in France. He brought us a young English person, pious, amiable, and educated; she seems pleased to be here; and as you already know, he also brought my dear Elvire, who has the beautiful name of Sister Mary Joseph. It would have been a great consolation for her to have seen you when she passed through Le Mans. It would also have been one for me; but that does not prevent us from often speaking of you. I intend now to make her acquainted with you as our superior, for she knows you by reputation as a theologian.[1] She admires the wonders God has wrought for us, and is happy to be called to labor in our mission. Since the return of the bishop we have had such an increase of pupils that the number is nearly doubled. Yesterday we counted eighty-five.

We have a plan in view, which I know will interest you; it is to open a school for our poor young Catholic girls who have not the means to attend our boarding school. When our new Mother House is completed we will give up this one to them. We have already four with whom to begin our work; they have not yet made their First Communion. In this our old house we are actually piled up on each other. I hope it is not only

[1] Bishop Bouvier was the author of a work in Latin entitled *"Institutiones Theologicae Ad Usum Seminariorum."* It was published in six volumes, and was highly esteemed throughout France.

literally it may be said that we are closely united. Happily Our Lord has diffused His spirit of charity among us, and with that we can bear gayly the inconveniences of close quarters. You, Father, were the first instrument of this holy mission of Indiana, and its support in its trials. I feel it must be a consoling thought to you to reflect on the multitude of children who, through you, now receive religious instruction. Five or six of our pupils are preparing to receive baptism. Bishop de Saint Palais baptized at his return the daughter of the State Treasurer, Miss Almeria Drake.

The good bishop writes us to-day that two Benedictine Fathers have arrived; he has been expecting them for some weeks. He invites Father Corbe to go and see them, promising to bring him back to Saint Mary's. We were happy, indeed, during the absence of his Lordship, to have good Father Corbe for Administrator. He is really all we could wish for for our community. He always speaks of you with the greatest interest, and is very grateful when you mention him in your letters. The bishop regretted keenly not to have seen you again when he passed through Le Mans. He was so happy with you, and your episcopal city has great charms for him. Monsieur Vincent is not forgotten.

We pray not only for you, but for all your diocese. We have asked Our Lord to bless your journey to Rome. No doubt but that when our Holy Father the Pope will kneel on his beautiful *prie-dieu,* he will think of Bishop Bouvier, and will feel disposed to grant him his requests. In waiting to obtain what our two Communities so sincerely desire, we will continue our prayers. It is by prayer that we are united in petitioning for the same favor. The altar is the center of our unity. Every morning you present to Our Lord your daughters in exile, that one day they may be with Him, and they in turn recommend to His Divine Heart the Father they so gratefully love.

April 27, 1854.

Your good letter of the month of February reached us on Holy Thursday. We thanked God that no ac-

cident befell you. We scarcely dared inquire about you for fear of receiving bad news.

We should have been very happy to have received your dear portrait for our New Year's gift, but we prefer to wait longer and have it painted in oil.

I must inform you of a ruse which came to my mind. For a long time we have wished Mother Theodore to have her portrait taken in oil,—we would even be satisfied with a daguerreotype—but neither our prayers nor our supplications have availed anything so far. She was extremely touched at your condescension. I am convinced that if you asked for her likeness she would not refuse it and we, looking upon what belongs to our Father as ours, would have it copied. What do you think of our scheme? Our reverend superior would be much pleased, and we still more so. We are happy, indeed, that God leaves us this much beloved Mother Theodore. She has been very sick this winter, but we had recourse to our great remedy—prayer. She is at present visiting our missions, whose number increases every year. How much good Mother Theodore does here! She knows how to make virtue loved, and to inspire us with the courage to practice it. A great union reigns among us all; truly we are like children of the same family by affection, and like children whom a little nothing amuses. The world all around our forest is an unfriendly world; but like little birds which sing from their nests, we also, without fearing the arrows of the hunter, rejoice in our solitude, having no other friends but our superiors and our companions. We have intense consolations in our pupils; three were baptized on Easter Sunday. They appeared so happy; what a comfort for us! One of them had a sister baptized last Sunday; four of the girls who come to our free school were baptized also. The eldest was seventeen years of age, the youngest five years. Their mother was a Protestant; their father died a Protestant, but they obtained permission to become Catholics. Two of our pupils who were converted here at Saint Mary's have entered the novitiate this year. We have at present fifteen postulants.

Perhaps Bishop Martin will bring us a reinforcement. Many towns in Indiana would like to have us, and outside of this State we are wanted also. We would have loved with all our heart to establish ourselves in the new diocese of Natchitoches,[1] but we are still too young to go so far.

During the month of May we shall pray much for the success of the voyage of Bishop Martin; we hoped his Lordship would come to Saint Mary's before going to see you in France, but he was unwilling to rob his flock of fifteen days of his precious time.

Our good bishop was sick nearly all winter. He is yet weak, although better. He continues to be for our Congregation what he always was; and for his orphans he has the tenderness of a father. We are very happy that God has caused the rainbow of peace to shine over our mission; we have no other storms than those which are raging above the tops of our trees, and for two weeks these are continuous; but the Cross on our high [2] house protects us, it is our sure lightning rod. Bishop Martin intends to go to Rome. Every time I hear Rome and our Holy Father the Pope mentioned, the thought of our holy Rules comes to my mind. I beg of God to let me live until the day when they will be solemnly approved. Is there any hope of this coming to pass soon? There is one point of the Rule that we sometimes wish could be changed. Though perhaps to the disadvantage of the superior, it would truly be profitable to the community; it is, that the office of Superior General might be perpetual, like that of the assistants; that is, that we might have the right to reëlect her as long as it be judged well to do so.

We rejoice each time that you have the goodness to allow the reëlection of Mother Mary; [3] in future times

1 Natchitoches was Bishop Martin's see. Bishop Martin had been Vicar General in the diocese of Vincennes. He pleaded the cause of the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods at Rome, and always remained their staunch friend.

2 The new Mother House was a three-story building—very high compared to their log cabin convent.

3 Mother Mary was the Superior General of the Congregation of Provi-

the successors of Bishop Bouvier and of Bishop de Saint Palais may not, perhaps, resemble them. We have no difficulties whatever in regard to the administration. Father Corbe appreciates our Mother Theodore, and by his example contributes to cause her to be loved and respected. I could never say enough in praise of this good Father Superior. Bishop Martin will be able to tell you better than I what a gift God made us on the day He gave him to us. His Lordship [Bishop Martin] is himself a precious gift for the inhabitants of Louisiana, for he unites piety to learning, talents to zeal.

We shall see one another in our true country, but we rejoice, and our American Sisters rejoice with us, in getting a glimpse of our good Father of Le Mans, even in this life. If Bishop Martin is too long in Europe you might send us your longed-for portrait through my family of Saint Servan. I have begged one of my sisters to forward to you an Indian mat for the tray of your coffee pot. Your wishes for our temporal prosperity have been heard—eighty-four pupils give us at the same time the means of doing them good and of receiving benefit from them.

The correspondence between the Bishop of Le Mans and the Sisters of Indiana comes to a sudden close. The illustrious prelate, although aged and feeble, journeyed to Rome in 1854 to attend the Vatican Council. Pope Pius IX, seeing the great infirmity and weakness of his beloved son, had him take rooms in the Vatican, a suite of six rooms on the ground floor being assigned him. By this arrangement he would not have to ascend the stairs in going back and forth to the sessions. The honored and grateful bishop had the joy, on December 8th,

dence at Ruillé-sur-Loir. She held that high office for forty-nine years with but six years' intermission, during which time Mother Saint Charles held the office.

of hearing proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The following day he was unable to rise and he died soon after with the Holy Father at his bedside.

CHAPTER XVI

MARRIAGE OF MADEMOISELLE LE FER DE LA MOTTE— DEATH OF MONSIEUR JOSEPH CHOËSNET

SHORTLY after the death of Monsieur le Fer de la Motte, his daughter Cecile was married to Monsieur Joseph Choësnet. Irma, as has been said, had long hoped that Cecile would come some day to join her. As soon as the will of God was manifested, however, she easily resigned herself, and encouraged her sister to follow her vocation. She said to her, among other things:

Well, my dear Cecile, Our Lord has called you to sanctify yourself in the married state, in the state which Saint Paul compares to the union of Our Lord with His spouse the Church. Yes, you will love him whom our good Father has chosen for you, and you will be happy with him. . . . Like the young Tobias and Sarah, you are the children of saints. You will aid each other to support the trials of life, and you will have the hope of being reunited beyond the grave. Mother Theodore has made me realize God's ways in your regard, and she is perfectly satisfied as to your future. With all my heart I approve of your choice. Assure my new brother of my prayers and my affection. Have courage, my child, for God watches over you. Let us love the dear Savior, who so loved us.

Irma wrote also to Monsieur Choësnet:

Would you believe that Cecile forgot to tell me your beautiful name? When, after your marriage, she did tell me, I experienced great peace and joy. I am under many obligations to Saint Joseph, both for my family

and for myself personally, so that it seems a mode of expressing gratitude to offer a loving and devoted brother to one who bears his name.

If storms come to trouble your peace, teach your dear Cecile to take refuge in the Heart of Jesus, an asylum always open and always safe. My very dear ones, the joys of this world pass all too quickly and are often followed by tears; but religion is at hand to sanctify them in their short duration. Trials last longer, but faith will help you to bear them. Ah! may you, through both joys and sorrows, one day reach our beautiful country! . . .

As Sister Saint Francis had written, the joys of this world are fleeting; and her sister's happiness was destined to be exceedingly brief. The embarrassments resulting from an entangled inheritance, which was arranged with great difficulty and delays, caused restrictions in household matters. Pertaining to this subject, Irma wrote to Cecile:

I quite understand your uneasiness about financial difficulties, debts which seem to have no end. But what are the affairs of time compared with those of eternity; some hundred francs due to man compared with God's book of accounts? How much good is effected by a half-hour's meditation and by the giving, the total abandonment, of one's self to God! Throw yourself into His bosom with your hands and feet tied. You have so little patience, without the cords of His divine grace you would go astray either to the right or to the left. It is grace alone which enables me, like you, to consent to your sufferings. While reading your letter Elvire and I now and then would say, "So much the better; trials will strengthen her and make her advance in the way of virtue." But we would add, "Poor Cecile!"

She wrote again:

Cecile, you are of an anxious disposition, but your

fears should not make you distrustful of Divine Providence. Trust in God, and brave all. Ask Him to give you back your old soul, that soul created by Him and for Him. Now, more than ever, I should like to prove to you both my love for you. I am praying for you specially, and I recommend you in a particular manner to Saint Joseph during his beautiful month. Elvire prays much for you, and so does Mother Theodore, who loves you even more dearly than ever. It is well for you that you did not care to come here, for she certainly would have spoiled you. Nevertheless, she intends giving you a sermon on confidence in the Providence of God, and she will not listen at all to your fears for the future. You will always have what is necessary. Tell Joseph that I shall not pray for him any more unless he gives up his idea of traveling. What will it avail you to have heard, "Woe to the rich," if in your heart you desire riches? You both want to go to heaven, and yet you would load yourselves with a burden that will keep you waiting at the gate. What! would you not purchase, at the cost of a few privations, an eternal kingdom, a kingdom prepared by God? Come, my dear ones, reanimate your faith. Will God ever let His children be in want? He gives food to the birds of the air, and is His goodness confined to them alone?

Pay some visits to Nazareth, and see how simple everything is there. Two little rooms, one a workshop where Saint Joseph with his adopted Son planes some boards; in the other a woman is seated mending clothes. There is no carpet, no sofa in that poor dwelling. But is not this cottage the home of our Blessed Mother? And this woman, who is her own servant and the servant of the family, is she not Mary the Mother of God and our tender Mother? If Saint Joseph had followed his own inclination he would have erected a throne for her. Willingly would he have crossed the forests of Lebanon in search of the most precious wood for exquisite furniture to offer her. But he knew God wished her to be poor, that it was only in heaven that she was to be

queen, and that there, in the midst of the splendor of her glory, she would still love the memory of Nazareth.

My dear Joseph, are we not heirs of a kingdom which is not of this world? Why, then, do we seek to have here below riches and consolations? We are Christians, and at the baptismal font we renounced the pomps and vanities of the world. Lift your eyes to heaven, for there a palace is being prepared for you and for all of us. The less *baggage* we have, the faster we shall move on, and when we arrive we shall be proud to have borne the glorious livery of Our Lord.

I ask for you the love of holy mediocrity. Ask for us the love of poverty. As I have espoused this dear virtue, it should be one of your kindred. I leave it to Cecile to convince you that she can be happy even without her cashmere; she has a heart that does not need to be *warmed* over. Your goodness, your virtues, your sincere piety, are far more precious to her than all your inventive generosity could offer.

A more grave and painful source of suffering than pecuniary embarrassments was soon to be the portion of the young couple. Scarcely two years after their marriage, Monsieur Choësnet began to suffer from hemorrhages, a prelude to the long and painful pulmonary disease which youth may indeed combat for some years, but never really conquer. From time to time the disease seemed to yield to remedies, or at least to make no progress, and on such occasions Monsieur Choësnet would flatter himself with the hope of a cure. More often, however, sadness inundated his soul, especially when he thought of his youth and of the many years of happiness which he might yet enjoy, but which were to be denied him. Amid these alternations of dejection and hope, despite his lively faith and sincere piety, the sweetness of his gentle disposition became noticeably altered.

This sad consequence of his illness was a source of additional suffering for them both; and Cecile, expecting no longer any earthly help, implored still more fervently that of Heaven.

In January, 1855, the city of Saint Servan celebrated the glory of Mary Immaculate. All the inhabitants, rich and poor, vied with one another in love and zeal for the proclamation of the dogma of Mary's stainless purity. From all the houses, and from every window were hung banners and oriflammes on which were inscribed the titles of Mary's glory and grandeur. Madame Choësnet had placed upon hers these words only, "Pity, O Mary!" Later she sent this symbol of her sorrow to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Irma alluded to it in a letter to her mother:

Now, my dear mother, you can see better the difference in our lots. If I were to have a device for my standard, it would be, "Thank you, O Mary!" Gratitude is the sentiment that rises above all others in my heart. You, also, are grateful for the vocation God has conferred upon two of us; and yet, strange to say, you would tremble if another of your daughters should ask to share the same happiness, and perhaps you would rather see her married. God is truly a *good* God, to be willing to love and recompense those who so greatly fear that their children may give themselves entirely to Him.

Irma wrote to her brother-in-law to console and encourage him in his sufferings:

God desires to keep you near Him, and He refuses you the most innocent pleasures of life, even that of health, in order that you may turn your heart entirely to Him. Indeed, my dear brother, you need our prayers, for this is an hour when nature would give way, if our Savior did not sustain you by His grace.

Father Gleizal, a good Jesuit, wrote to our dear little novice, Sister Josephine who is now in heaven, and who loved you because you bore her name and suffered from the same disease, "Have courage, my child; it is Jesus who presents you His cross under all these forms. You would like to go about, and you have to remain shut up in your room—well, that is a cross; you are oppressed—that is a cross; you are sad, and tempted to discouragement—that also is a cross."

I should like to send you good Father Gleizal himself, for he is a living unction to sweeten the cross. He is often ill, but, inasmuch as he has surmounted his own weakness, he is full of compassion for others. In features he resembles my beloved father; perhaps it is on this account that what he says affects me so much. God has taken from you, as He did from us, an excellent father, and when I go to heaven I shall make his acquaintance. There, too, you will see the one whom Cecile wishes you might have known on earth. Dear Cecile! I like to think of her as near you like the angel that consoled Our Lord in His agony. She will remind you that salvation is secured by drinking to the very dregs the cup of suffering. My dear Joseph, when we are in Heaven we shall not remember our afflictions, except to thank God for having sent them to us.

Though the world and nature no doubt think you very unfortunate, Cecile and you are, in the light of faith, two well-loved privileged children. Alas! my poor heart, too, sometimes says what nature and the world say. Just now I am suffering from oppression and I cough at night, and then my thoughts turn to you. For the last three months, or rather for the last year, I have seen my beloved Mother Theodore growing daily weaker and weaker; knowing how this affects me, I think of Cecile and say to myself, My heart, like hers, suffers more in the one it loves than if the sufferings were its own. Since Mother Theodore fell into the Ohio River last year she has been very ailing. She was obliged to keep her bed part of the time during her visitation of the missions, and she is unable even now

to leave the house; but I am sure Saint Anne, to whom we have great devotion, will obtain her cure.

Elvire and myself often speak of you; she also frequently visits your room in spirit and brings you to our chapel by her prayers. She places you both at the feet of Our Lord. We are united in prayer for you and beg you to give us a share in your sufferings. Some day in heaven we shall rejoice with the same joy.

Sister Saint Francis never learned of the death of her brother-in-law. When the letter announcing it reached Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, she herself had quitted this world.

CHAPTER XVII

DEATH OF IRMA'S GODMOTHER, HER AUNT MADEMOISELLE MARIE LE FER DE LA MOTTE

ON January 1st, 1854, Mademoiselle Marie le Fer de la Motte was carried off suddenly from her family. Upon the death of this dear aunt and godmother whom she tenderly loved, Irma wrote:

To Her Aunt, Madame de la Salle

March 8, 1854.

My beloved Aunt:—Yesterday morning I said to Elvire, I am going to write to my poor godmother; and in the afternoon we heard she was no more, or rather that she lives where she sees my thoughts and hears my prayers. My precious Aunt Marie, you will not forget her whom you presented to God on the day of her birth, and who, though far away, sheds tears in spirit at your grave. Whenever heretofore any misfortune happened to the family I was able to find words of comfort for my godmother; but to-day it seems that I myself need to be consoled. God has given me Elvire to weep with me, to speak to me of your courage, your resignation, and your love for Him. He has given us also in our beloved and devoted superior a model of every virtue and a heart that understands every weakness. She is more occupied with you and with us than with her own sufferings, which are, nevertheless, very great. Our Lord has given us also our good Father Corbe, who this morning said Mass for his dear "stocking-knitter," as he called her. This will not be the last time he offers it for her; he will continue to do so frequently, as he was accustomed to do during her life. Then, too, on Thursday all the Sisters will offer their

Communion for my dear aunt. I hope she is praying for us; but, as my father said, "We must pray for all; if our prayer is not of service to one, it will benefit others." I am glad my loved godmother was spared the last agony. She who was so fearful, who always had the *Quando judex* on her lips, was awakened by the harmonious canticles of angels! Ah! beloved aunt, why were you so fearful of your future happiness? . . .

My cousins have a large share in my affection, but I shall not speak of them now, nor even think of them. To-day I have a severe headache, and I promised Mother Theodore not to weep. Let us instead talk of our Holy Father, Pius IX. Imagine the joy with which we read in the letter from my cousin, Henri de la Motte, the holy pontiff's words: "You belong to a good stock; I bless your *saintly* family." Well, then, I said to myself, if the Holy Father himself has said so, surely God will not be displeased if we *praise* ourselves a little. Our good grandmother would not have had contrition for her faults, if she had heard Henri's letter.

I remember one day while I was dressing, my grandmother was seated in her armchair near the table. She said to me, "Abbé Sauvage is coming; help me, my little daughter, to make my examination of conscience. I cannot find anything." I replied: "During your prayers you have wondered whether the cook would be able to find fish for the Friday dinner, and, in case not, what you would serve in its place." "That is true," she said; "and then?" "You have boasted of your children and your grandchildren." "They are so good!" she sighed. "And then, my child?" "What, grandmother, would you have more? Excite yourself to contrition now, with all your heart, and go quickly to the chapel." I was at the end of my knowledge, and I believed I had found the Alpha and Omega of my dearly loved grandmother's faults. Happy would it be for us, had we as little with which to reproach ourselves. O my dear aunt, when shall we be with our cherished family in heaven?

To Her Sister Eugenie

April, 1854.

I condole with you on the loss of our excellent Aunt Marie. How lovable she was and how devoted to us! I can hear you say, "Alone among strangers! Who will take the place of these dear departed ones?" Jesus, our Father, will take their place, He who has been with us from our birth to the present hour; He who knew all the joys and sorrows of our childhood; He who has so often consoled us, who loves us so dearly, who will be with us to encourage us at the hour of death. *Nemo tam pater,* as Saint Augustine says. How good it is to have Him; how sweet to be going to Him! The world passes away, but Jesus remains. Tell Cecile He will stay until the very last, and when the twelfth of us shall think himself alone, Our Lord will be with him. One takes the cars in the evening, the other the following morning; but this matters little, provided only that at the end of the journey we find ourselves together.

How I pity the unfortunate Lamennais! What a contrast between him and my father! I am disgusted with wit and science, and above all with pride. I bury myself in my littleness, my misery, my incapacity. I wrap myself up in my awkwardness. Pray that I may keep myself in this blessed mantle. Ah! vanity of vanities, all is vanity except to love God.

You tell me your soul is in a drought, in a desert without water. I know this condition of the soul more by what others say than by my own experience, for God treats me as a spoiled child whom He wishes to draw to Himself by little gifts. The mere description of your desolation and darkness is sufficient to make my nature cry aloud. Saint Francis de Sales has some excellent things on this subject. I remember that when I read what he says of the advantages of this state I almost desired to pass through it, for in this deprivation the soul serves God for Himself alone.

Let us place our souls in the hands of our dear Heavenly Father, asking Him to do with us as He

pleases; and let us peacefully steer our course with the help of our book, when the wind is wanting to swell the sails of our understanding. My dear Eugenie, I beg you not to be sad. It is good for us to be annihilated in our own eyes. I shall pray for you with all my heart. Prayer is the great remedy; all others are merely like the barley-tea prescribed by Dr. L——. They do no harm, but they effect very little good.

To Madame de la Salle

May 2, 1854.

My dearly loved Aunt: I have collected here and there a number of anecdotes to tell you, and now that I have come to have a chat, the first thing I shall say is, Thank you a thousand times for your dear letter. I know well you always love us (it would be very cruel not to do so); nevertheless, a little word from our only surviving aunt does the heart good.

Now you know you have to make up for the love of the other three. No one will take my cherished godmother's place, but we shall soon meet again; for that reason I am tranquil enough regarding those who are gone. I pray more for our boys, because to them time is more than eternity, and everything in this world appears very important. Poor children! if they had received the graces given to me they would be better than I am; for the worst thing is to know the greatness of God, the nothingness of all that passes with time, and yet to live as it were forgetful of all this.

I must not however disedify you and leave you without hope for the conversion of your niece. It seems to me that since Christmas I am a little more rational about the death of those I love. I have a dear little novice who is charming and on whom I had founded much hope; she is dying under my eyes, yet I scarcely say one word to God to retain her. She is so pure, so innocent, so well prepared. Each morning I think she will not last until evening; but the evening finds her still alive, and so does the next morning. Twelve days ago she

received Extreme Unction. How good it is to have given up all before death separates us from those dear to us! I remember something dear Aunt Jeanne said to me when she heard that I wished to come to America: —"My poor child, how happy you will be at the hour of death to have only your body to leave!" How well she understood the religious vocation! She had truly given all to God and she had made a sacrifice which I have not yet achieved: she had immolated her pride. My Aunt Jeanne was, to my mind, the personification of humility and of a life hidden in God. I often propose her as a model to my novices; better, indeed, would it be if their mistress could be a living copy for them.

At present we have in our vicinity some dear emigrants who are finishing the railroad between here and Terre Haute. We can now make the distance of four miles in ten minutes. If you could only see how much the appearance of our forest has changed within twelve years! Souls, I hope, have been even more improved, yet there is still much ignorance to be dispelled.

May 16.

Our dear little Sister Josephine is dead. Fragrant flower of spring, she exhaled all the perfume of her love in the bosom of her beloved Jesus who was her all. She was as beautiful as the angels are painted, and as pure as our dear Sister Seraphine. One day Mother Theodore said to her, "Do not trouble yourself about your vocal prayers; say only from time to time to our Lord, 'My God, I love you!'" "Ah!" she said, smiling, "He has known that for a long time." He did know it, and she could say with David, *What do I desire in heaven or on earth, if not you, O God of my heart?* Poor Father Corbe grieves as much as I do over the loss of our dear child; we thought he would not be able to finish the prayers at her burial. Fortunately good Father[1] Michel came to his aid; his voice never failed even at the requiem of his wife; he is a very good man, but his feelings have no effect on his voice.

[1] So called by all the Sisters, because he was the father of three in the community.

To Miss Martha Brett, one of her former pupils who had disclosed to her her desire of being a religious, Irma wrote:

Dear Martha, as I had been uneasy about you, I was very happy to receive your letter. Do not make excuses for your style; I am always pleased with what comes from the heart, but I will permit you to explain your laziness, as I accuse it very strongly of being the cause of your silence.

I showed your letter to Mother Theodore, for it is from her I derive my clearest light, although she knows you less than I do. I pray for you and for your brother. Be courageous and hope in the goodness of God. Perhaps, though, God will make you pay for his conversion by sacrifice, or rather He will have you buy it with tears. Heaven is worth all our sufferings, and when we arrive there, we shall think that even an entire life of privations bears no proportion to the immensity of eternal happiness.

I am glad you do not speak of your intentions to any one; a secret that God keeps is well kept. Confide in that faithful Friend, and ask Him for light, and, above all, for strength, and begin to act purely for Him. Sister Saint Charles told me that she had received a letter from you; she added that you are a mystery to her. I did not betray your confidence nor make any allusion to it. It is not astonishing that she suspects nothing. I am sure she would pray fervently for you, if she had the least idea of your intentions, or knew the contents of your letter and your beautiful hopes.

So they tell you there are thorns under the roses at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. Do you think I am going to deceive you? No; I tell you what I tell the postulants:—the thorns are those belonging to the crown of our Lord, our King; but they have been so deeply driven into His adorable Head that the points are dulled. Do not fear them; for if they wound, they heal at once by virtue of the Precious Blood which stains them.

CHAPTER XVIII

NEW CONVENT CHAPEL—DOGMA OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION PROCLAIMED—JOY AT SAINT MARY-OF-THE-WOODS

THANKS to the goodness of God, the pecuniary resources of the community in 1852 justified the Sisters in replacing, by an attractive brick building, the small chapel with which they had thus far been obliged to content themselves. In a letter to Pepa, Irma described the ceremony of blessing, which took place in August, 1853:

Yesterday the statue of the Blessed Virgin was carried in triumph to our new chapel.[1] Oh! if you could have seen it encircled by branches of lilies. Our Lady appeared truly happy to return to us again.[2] The Sisters were much affected at the sight of our richly ornamented altar and of the beautiful exposition[3] of white flowers. The chapel has been blessed under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph. For four days we were without the Blessed Sacrament; our former chapel was desolate, the tabernacle was taken away, and we were like spirits wandering from place to place without knowing where to rest. But yesterday, when the bishop pronounced the words of consecration, our dear Lord came to dwell in His new habitation. How we wept! He has followed us in all our vicissitudes, our cabin and our frame house. Now

1 The new chapel was a large room, afterwards the refectory, in the new convent building.

2 Their statue of the Blessed Virgin had been in the village church for many years.

3 A kind of baldachino made of net and flowers.

He resides in a beautiful brick house, but without Him how dreary it would be! Dear Pepa, you cannot understand our joy. As for me, I was overcome, and the bishop and Father Corbe were much affected. Abbé Audran was so excited that he had an attack of fever. Ah! such as he and ourselves, children of misery and distress, are able to appreciate this happiness.

Mother Theodore's joy was so great that she was constantly afraid she was going to say her *Nunc dimittis*. We have been comparing the past with the present. Twelve years ago a little plank covered with a piece of soiled blue calico, supported the Sacred Host in a tottering cabin. O my Jesus! how good, how good you are! But how fortunate are we to afford You a better lodging! Abbé Collet's beautiful candlesticks were on the altar near Natalia's vases, which were filled with Easter daisies from Cecile and Joseph. The alb and chasuble were given by Alphonse; Sister Mary Joseph had the privilege of lining the tabernacle; she will tell mother what other things she did. I painted on the tabernacle of the old chapel a heart near the lock, and another on the little column; one was my mother's, the other mine. Indeed, all our hearts are deeply imprinted in the Heart of Jesus. My mother surely must receive the favors asked for her here. Our seven Sisters of the laundry made a novena for her, and during that time candles burned before the statue of the Blessed Virgin which Monsieur Dupont gave us.

There are true saints among these excellent lay Sisters; they work like men and pray like angels. I must tell you the great consolation one of them had at Christmas. Mother Theodore told her she might assist in taking care of the cows. "O Mother!" she said, "for a whole year I have asked this favor of our Divine Lord. I longed to be in the stable because Jesus was born there, and now, on Christmas Day, He grants me this desire!"

In 1854 the Sisters at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, like the Catholics throughout the world, awaited with re-

spectful impatience the decision of the Church upon the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. In her letters of this period, Irma speaks often of Mary Immaculate, the thought of whom was always with her. Thus in writing to Abbé Dupontavice and speaking of her brother Alphonse, who had been his fellow-student at the Seminary of Rennes, she said:

Your little abbé is very lazy, but he has, for all that, many good qualities. His heart must beat with joy at the thought of what is occurring at Rome. He told me in one of his letters, "If I do not love the Blessed Virgin as much as I would wish to, she knows well that I love her as much as my miserable heart is capable of loving." He never lets me ask for him any gift of God except a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin. "I shall arrange matters with her," he said to me. "Have no fear; whoever invokes her till the end of his life will never perish."

On the 10th of December, 1854, Irma wrote to her mother:

To-day we are celebrating the beautiful feast of our Immaculate Mother. Oh! how happy I am to be still alive, for this year the truth which is so dear to my heart shall become obligatory upon the whole Catholic world. We prayed much for you all Friday, December eighth, and we are doing the same to-day. It seems Our Lord is so happy that He will grant everything to those who invoke Him through His Mother and by His Mother. To pray for the Blessed Virgin! This is a favor that was reserved for us. Since the Council of Ephesus Christians have not had to pray for the honor of their Mother. Elvire and I remarked this while working at our white flowers.

At last, on January 14 [1855], the grand and happy news of the Holy Father's declaration reached Saint

Mary-of-the-Woods. Irma expressed her joy and happiness in the following letter:

To Her Sister Eugenie

Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, Jan. 14, 1855.

"Mary conceived without sin!"

Eugenie, you shall be the first to whom I shall say, "Let us rejoice!" Mary, Mary our Mother, has at last obtained the title, a thousand times desired, "Mary conceived without sin!" O Mary! I return thanks to you because of your glory. To-day we learned the happy tidings; the angels and saints knew it long ago, and you also knew it. But we are so far away. The Holy Name of Jesus brought us this precious message. Mary and Jesus! How good it is to love them! And how happy our good father, Saint Joseph, must be! We are going to salute Saint Anne, for it is certainly a great honor for her too. My dear Eugenie, how happy you must have been, more than happy, even proud! Indeed, I feel proud to the very depths of my soul. Our own Mother is pronounced immaculate. She was conceived without sin. O sweet article of our faith! shall we not be recompensed for believing in thee?—No, no, my God, no other recompense than our present happiness. Let us thank You, but do not pay us.

Yesterday Father Corbe read in the *Univers* the telegraphic dispatch, but the mischievous Father kept it secret. I declare I should never have been able to imitate his discretion. This morning at Mass, after preaching on the Gospel of the day and commenting on the first miracle of Jesus, made at the intercession of His Mother, of Mary watching over the least interests of her children, Father Corbe announced that this divine Mother had been proclaimed immaculate by the Church. I was not present, but a postulant ran with all her speed to tell me. Elvire was the second with the news. I kissed them both. How happy Mother Theodore is! If you could know what a peal she gave our bell! All

the Sisters except myself hastened to the chapel. Then the *Te Deum,* the organ, the voices of all our Sisters! Besides the statue in the chapel, every image of the Blessed Virgin is ornamented, from "Our Lady of the Valley" to the statue in the kitchen—everywhere tapers, flowers, and garlands. Then the postulants went singing hymns from place to place, wherever there was a representation of Our Lady. General recreation was given and—at dinner they will talk.

Sister Mary Theodore, Mother Theodore's niece, who lately arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, entered my room and pressed my hand, tears flowing from her eyes all the while. She was trembling so much that I told her she must warm herself. "I am not cold," was her answer. "How did it happen," said Elvire to her, "that you understood what Father Corbe said?—he spoke in English." "Why," she replied with vivacity, "does news like this have to be told in words? I heard nothing, but I understood all." She was so overcome by this heavenly news that she thought she would faint in the church. The English the Blessed Virgin translates is the most expressive. Sister Mary Theodore will be a worthy niece of Mother Theodore, a true daughter of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, a Sister of Providence.

Our Mother has gone with some of the Sisters to pay a visit of congratulation to Father Corbe. It is well I do not form a part of the embassy, for I would scold him for not telling his secret yesterday. No, after all, I could not do it to-day; to-day I pardon everything. The Academy Sisters are coming from all directions. Some are laughing, some crying, and some embracing each other. People are glad to be alive on such an occasion, though they would be happy to die. They pour out their joy and still preserve it in their hearts.

At last I am permitted to go to the chapel. For five weeks I had been deprived of a sight of the altar, but not of the God of the altar, for the good Savior has been twice to visit me. When I entered the chapel they were singing the *Magnificat.* At the words, *All generations shall call me blessed,* my heart was moved so

deeply that I sobbed aloud. I had intended to pray so fervently for you, for all our benefactors, and for our friends of the *Univers,* well, I could not say a word. When I raised my eyes, I saw the Blessed Sacrament exposed in our beautiful ostensorium, and above it the sweet image of our Immaculate Mother. This blessed statue, before which we have obtained so many graces, was surrounded with lights and flowers. The altar was luminous. The voices of our Sisters were doubtless aided by our friends in heaven, for never before did they sing so well. Much as I wished to pray, I could only shed tears during Benediction, and still more at the *Te Deum,* which Father Corbe sang with all his heart.

I must say something now of the feast of the eighth of December. No doubt you suppose it was a good day for us, but you are mistaken, unless, indeed, you understand by a good day a day full of contradictions, temptations, and vexations of every kind. The demon, whose head was crushed at Rome, stirred up our whole community with his tail. We cannot remember his having ever before made so many efforts to prevent us from feasting our Blessed Mother. The more our Sisters tried to sing, the worse they sang. The acolyte who was to serve Father Corbe did not arrive until after the Gospel. Father Corbe himself, who had promised to give the scapular, forgot to bring his book containing the prayers for the blessing. The tapers would not be lighted, or, after being lit, they would go out. It was with difficulty we were able to make our blue and white flowers for the church, etc. But, fortunately, evening came at last, and when Elvire entered my room, I asked her what she thought of the day. "It was horrible!" she said. I put the same question to Mother Theodore, and she made the same answer. We laughed, though tears of weariness were in our eyes. The devil howled in our forest, he roared with rage. We wondered what was being done against him, and thought that perhaps he had been humiliated at Rome, and was taking vengeance upon us.

On the evening of the 8th of December I said to

Elvire: I would like to know how our Holy Father has passed this day—whether the demon has tormented him, or whether he has tormented the demon. When later I heard of the declaration of the Immaculate Conception, I almost pardoned the poor devil all the mischief he had done us, for he surely had suffered much on that day. Certainly he will never forget the 8th of December, 1854.

To her brother, the abbé, she added:

What joy, what admirable concert! Do you hear the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ? It rises from earth to heaven, singing the solo of our hymn of thanksgiving, while the Church militant, united with the Church triumphant, repeats the chorus in perfect harmony.

To Her Cousins, Madame le Fer de Chantelou and Madame des Cognets

[1853 or 1854.]

Elvire and I are amused at the great trouble which people take in giving a dinner or in discharging the important business of buying a dress or a bonnet, and we say, That is the way of the world; we did the same ourselves when we were in it.

People here are astonished at the peculiar sentiments of our Irish people, which are, nevertheless, more conformable to faith than ours are. We have perhaps two hundred families near us constructing a railroad. They are delighted when their relatives die in the neighborhood of a church. "I was afraid," said one young man, "that my father would not die this week. Had he lived longer he could not have had the priest nor have been buried in consecrated ground." Once, when Father Corbe had given Extreme Unction to a sick man and was leaving the hut, he was surrounded by a number of Irishmen, who said to him: "Surely the happiest of all our band is the one you have just anointed. What a good chance he has of going to heaven! And how lucky

he is! If he had died when we were sixty or eighty miles from here, he could not have had the priest."

The other day Sister Olympiade heard an Irishwoman say to her companion, who had just lost her child, "Why are you crying? Was not your child baptized?" "Yes, it was, and now it is an angel in heaven." "Well," rejoined the first woman, "to enter heaven you must be an angel, too, or a saint, which will be more difficult for you than for it. Be satisfied that it died when it can so easily go to God." These simple words sufficed to make the poor mother perfectly resigned. Despite their faults, I love these good people very much; they are little attached to the things of earth, and they have the greatest respect for priests. Many of them have so great confidence in God that they obtain extraordinary favors. A few weeks ago our chaplain was called to see a sick man some miles from here. Taking the Blessed Sacrament, he started, and, after having missed his way, he at last found in a deep solitude, a miserable cabin six miles from any other habitation. There on the ground was a poor Irishman, surrounded by five or six little children. On seeing the priest, he exclaimed, "Did I not tell you I should not die without confession! I was sure my God would come to visit me!" If we were only as sure as this poor man of the goodness of Jesus, He would cross the desert to unite Himself with us in our sufferings.

Last Sunday Father Corbe, when giving us an instruction on Extreme Unction, told us he had no doubt that those who received this Sacrament with the same faith as these Irish people would unquestionably be saved. He added that when they died shortly after receiving the indulgence for a good death it was his opinion that they went immediately to heaven, so great was their confidence in the efficacy of the Last Sacraments.

We have just established our tenth mission in Indiana. Mother Theodore, who accompanied our Sisters, says the poor people wept for joy. It was the first time religious had been seen at Lanesville. Our Academy numbers many pupils, but our Sisters are very few.

The pupils generally behave very well. I had the pleasure lately of preparing one of them, eighteen years old, for baptism. Her father, a Protestant minister, had inspired her with profound hatred of the Catholic religion. Feeling perfectly assured of her sentiments, he did not hesitate to send her to Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. During the first few months of her sojourn here, she corresponded perfectly with her father's views. She could not hear a sermon without becoming angry; she scorned all the ceremonies of religion, and had special contempt for the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. One day after Mass she paid a visit to our chaplain, and said to him, "Do you suppose I would go on my knees to receive one of your wafers?"

O my God, how good You are, and how merciful is Your vengeance! Not only did this proud girl kneel and weep before our altar, but she has broken the chains that bound her heart to the world and she is determined to become a religious. She is to be commended for her assiduity in coming for catechism. She has already suffered for the faith, since her companions, seeing her so changed, accuse her of acting in this way in order to gain the favor of the Sisters. Remember her in your prayers, for, if she perseveres, she will be able to do much good. You know how happy parents are in France on the day of their children's First Communion; and think of it, yesterday not one parent was here, not even a friend. Alas! it was into our arms the little girls had to throw themselves. One of them said to me, "Since my baptism it seems to me I am no longer myself; I feel as if I had passed into the body of another person."

Poor Almeria Drake cannot obtain from her father permission to be baptized. She cried all during Mass, as also did a little Catholic child named Isabelle, who was too young to make her First Communion. The poor little child sought comfort in what to another would have been a punishment. She waited in the chapel for more than an hour to go to confession. "At least," she said, "I can do something for my companions. All the

older pupils have offered a Communion for them, and I shall offer a confession." I spent the evening with the newly-baptized in the garden, where there is a pond. The ducks were swimming about in the water. "O Sister!" said one of the neophytes, "don't the ducks and geese look happier to-day than yesterday? The birds, too, sing more gayly this evening than ever before." How everything seemed to smile on them! Never before had the flowers appeared so beautiful. Oh! but a day like yesterday does one good! I shed many tears, but they were tears of joy.

Will you, my dear friends, assure my cousin Leonce of my cordial affection? My sisters often speak of him. He not only adorns the garden of Rosais—thanks to his exquisite taste—but he also smooths the path of virtue for our young people, because he shows by his example that one can be joyous and at the same time a fervent Christian.

I thank you for the seeds you sent me; they seem to like the American soil very much, and they obey the command given on the third day of creation, "Increase and multiply." Father Michel [1] is delighted to have French flowers.

To Her Mother

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Aug. 16, 1855.

How much good your sweet and pious letter did us! I say us, for our dear Mother Theodore read it and I

[1] This Father Michel was an excellent man, a chorister of the community, and a humble and faithful friend of the Sisters of Providence. In the beginning of her last illness, Sister Saint Francis thought of him and sent him this message, "Sister Saint Francis offers her sufferings for you, and asks that you also offer some little thing for her." Whether it was the effect of Irma's desire, I cannot say, but certain it is that the following Sunday the poor man lost his voice, and, to his great disappointment, he was unable to chant Vespers. This was for him a real deprivation, and when Sister Mary Joseph asked, "Why did you not sing, Father Michel? Was it because our Sisters intoned badly?" "Oh no," he replied, "they never sang better. Sister M. Ambrose and Sister Seraphine replaced me so well that I thought there was nothing more for me except to go to Paradise." This inspiration was without doubt a useful warning to him, for he died piously a few days later, Sunday, the twenty-seventh of January, the same day on which Sister Saint Francis received her holy Viaticum.

listened. The night after it came I did not sleep very much, and I shed tears of gratitude and love. The next morning I had the happiness of renewing my vows and seeing five postulants receive the Habit. How we pray for you on these beautiful days! You must have felt the breeze of America; I hope it dried your tears. Truly, dear mother, we are all of us spoiled children of Providence, and it is a great pity we have not more courage to suffer the anxieties of life. If God wishes the absence of some members of the family, where is the evil? If He wishes some to be happy where He is, where is the evil? You know well that the only real evil is when our dear absent ones are not walking in the right road; and yet, even then, we must not lose hope.

We often receive news from Europe by the telegraph. In the United States we have electric telegraph, and in less than half an hour we can have information regarding what has happened fifteen hundred miles away. Any one who pays the rate of two cents for each letter of the alphabet used in his message, may employ this method of communication. There is talk of having a telegraph which shall pass through the ocean. The other day I thought what a happy invention it would be if a bridge could be made to extend from earth to heaven. But on reflection I recalled that Our Lord Himself has made such a bridge—the Cross. O unique way! Why are so few Christians willing to travel it? We all wish to go to heaven, but without stirring, without fatiguing ourselves, without separation from one another, hand-in-hand, just as if we were dancing in a ring. But since the road is too narrow to be traveled in this easy-going manner, we must be ready every day to have some one or other separate from us. See how the Talabardon family is tried. I intend asking for you perfect abandonment; but you must pray for us also, especially for Mother Theodore. Pray for her more than for me, because what is given to the sap returns with profit to all the branches.

Last evening I spoke to Elvire of the desire I now have that you would make your purgatory on earth, and

I said to her: Should we ourselves go there, it would be only because of our cowardice, for purgatory was never intended for religious. God has drawn us from the dangers of the world, and since He gives us countless means, not only for sanctification but also for the attainment of high perfection, it would be a great shame if we did not go straight to Paradise.

I shall let dear Elvire tell you the baptism of her guitar pupil, Almeria Drake. Elvire made her a beautiful crown which aroused the envy of her companions. Poor Sister Mary Joseph was much affected during the ceremony, and would have had her cry all out in peace, had not the little organist pulled her Habit to make her sing. I thanked God in my littleness for not having made me as full of talent as my sister, for it is very troublesome to be good for everything. We shall soon have two more baptisms.

Both Mother Theodore and I are watchful not to show exteriorly too much affection for Elvire, and thus far, all is well. This good Mother has all the anxieties, all the tenderness, I should even say all the weakness of a mother; if any one could replace a mother, it is indeed she. Like my poor father, she makes acts of resignation for things that never happen. She is very much occupied with our new building; God has given her all that is needed to *edify*. The best financiers declare that she surpasses them all in business matters. Our community is free from debt. I still have the horror of debt with which my father inspired us, though otherwise I have not an inch of stuff to qualify me for an administrator. I would rather be a beggar woman.

Adieu, my dearest mother, have you yet found that much-desired time for prayer and meditation? You used to say, "When my children have grown up"; and now when they are grown up God sends other fatigues, other trials, in order to detach us from this earth which we still consider ours. You know well I have never asked God to grant you a cloudless voyage through life, but a happy coming into port. Ah! when we have all arrived, what joy shall be ours! Each will recount his

trials, and all will thank the generous Guide who helped us to surmount them. To Him, our compassionate Jesus, shall be the glory; to us the joy and peace.

To a friend she writes:

I have never experienced a sweeter sentiment than that of finding others to be my superiors. Perhaps weakness naturally needs support, but I love to meet people who surpass me in merit and in dignity. When Mother Theodore was in France, I had a rather humiliating experience in this particular. The Governor of Indiana announced himself as coming for a visit. We set to work, swept the house, the court, etc., and as he understood French, I prepared a pretty little speech. He arrived. I stepped forward, opened my mouth, but instead of speaking—oh!—! His Excellency seemed greatly surprised at my emotion. I told him that, having been accustomed since my childhood to consider all legitimate authority as representatives of God on earth, he must not be astonished if I was affected on seeing the highest temporal superior of the State. I think it was the first time in his life he heard such sentiments expressed, for he seemed more than amazed. He spoke to several different persons afterwards of the pleasure he derived from his visit to Saint Mary's, and of the hospitable manner in which he had been entertained. God, in placing me here, has given me such good superiors that it is easy for me to keep my old French way of acting. The republican system of equality has never been in accord with my royalist education. Long live the King!

I have often written you in regard to the "Propagation of the Faith," and sometimes in regard to charity, as it seems to me that the pleasure we experience in trying to make others happy is very pleasing to God. Oh! how happy we should be if we could look upon the defects of our neighbor only through the bandage that Jesus wore for love of us. Like Him we would love our fellow-creatures despite their miseries; or rather,

their souls, enhanced with the love and the sufferings of a God, would appear so beautiful to us that we would hardly see the defects.

To a Missionary Priest

Oh! and Father Faber writes well, does he not? There are some things, however, that I do not like very much; they are too high for me. Some passages seem too lofty for our limited knowledge. I think we shall make an extract from this book [The Blessed Sacrament] which contains such beautiful and good things. Like you, I am hard to please. Even Bossuet, when he speaks of this divine subject, is not able to satisfy me. Only the heart of a seraph should direct the pen treating such mysteries of love, and how much would still remain unexpressed. Happy, you priests, to be initiated so intimately into the knowledge of this ineffable Sacrament; truly, it is not too much that you pray for us at the altar. To be a priest is more than to be a king; it is more than to be an angel. The human reason is lost in the depth of this dignity. Oh! I love to pray for priests; it is almost to pray for Jesus Christ Himself. He so much desires that His priests love Him and that they make Him loved. How happy we are to work for such a good Master. He is so grateful for the good He makes us do. What will be the reward if the work is so sweet. Yes, cold and ice must be blessed; for everything is good from such a good God. What seems to us the bitterest is often for us afterwards a source of sweetness. I like the hymn of the children of Babylon; it reminds me of the most beautiful day of my life, when I took the Holy Habit. It was a winter day and the priest began his discourse by these words: *Snow and ice, bless ye the Lord.* . . .

As Sister Saint Francis Xavier's intense love for the Holy Eucharist has been frequently mentioned, the series of her letters may be fittingly terminated by a colloquy addressed to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacra-

ment, and written in her note book shortly after her arrival in America:

To speak of You, O my dear Jesus! to speak of You in the Sacrament of the Eucharist is impossible. We can speak of Your birth in a stable on a little straw, of Your agonizing death on the cross, because to be born and to die are the lot of man, and You became man. But who can understand that Your love was not satisfied by thirty-three years of suffering? O my sweet Savior! who could ever have thought of a greater sacrifice? All Your love was necessary to invent such devotedness.

How You have loved us, O Jesus! Heaven would no longer have sufficed for You, were You unable to remain with us on earth. You had assumed our nature; You knew our weaknesses; You realized that we needed a Friend who could understand all our sorrows, another Heart to support our faltering ones. But the friends of this world leave us; hearts often cease to respond to friendship, and others are stilled in death. O my Jesus, men are like reeds that break under and wound the hand which leans upon them for support.

But what would we do without a refuge, without a friend? O Jesus, You have changed Yourself into the substance of bread and made Yourself a prisoner with Your slaves. You have said to them: "Come to Me, if you suffer, and I will console you. Look at My wounds. Have I not suffered too?"

Ah! it is You, my Savior, who came to-day to comfort my mother. You seemed to be too far away from her; hence You have drawn nearer to our house.[1] This morning You came for the first time to the little Chapel of Nazareth built for You; there my mother will come to pray for me when evening shall have fallen. The evenings are so sad in winter; they will be so long for my mother when one of the stars of her firmament shall rise on another horizon. O my God! hear her

1 Villegurie—the homestead—now had its own little chapel.

prayers, and grant me now the grace I ask;—it is a great favor, I know, but I ask it of Your Heart so tender—it is to console my mother not by having her forget me, but rather by causing her to love You more in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

May Your love make her forget the anxiety I caused her during my childhood by the faults which she has so generously pardoned. O my Savior, I beg of You to grant my request. I shall be so happy! Oh! You almost owe it to my mother for she has given You her daughter, her Irma whom You asked of her and whom You love so much. Ah! how much my parents love me! And for all their care and tenderness I have nothing to give them. O my Jesus! You are so rich, give them a beautiful present for me. I seem to hear You telling me to choose from among all Your possessions. Alas! I find nothing among all Your treasures to please them so much as their child. There is only one thing that would suffice, and that is immeasurably great. O my Savior, shall I name it? Ah! it is You, my God, You Yourself in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. O Sacrament of the love of my Jesus, console my family, strengthen my father, dry the tears of my mother, give joy to my sisters, be the haven of my brothers. O Fatherland, home of the exiled! be the Heaven of our earth, be our Riches, our Strength, our Life; be the sure Pledge of our never-ending reunion!

Her Prayer for Indiana

Remember, O Lord, this land of Indiana, which You possessed from the beginning, of which You thought from all eternity; which You held in Your powerful hand when You created the world, and which was hidden in Your adorable Heart when, in dying on the cross, You confided its poor inhabitants to the care of Your divine Mother.

O Lord, remember Indiana! Say but the word and all here will be made children of Abraham. Send good laborers into Your vineyard, holy missionaries who will

have no other interests than Yours, men according to Your own Heart, and true servants of Mary, Your holy Mother.

They will defend Your glory, they will publish Your Name, they will save souls that have cost You Your Precious Blood. Visit us by Your power and in Your mercy. We ask these favors by the intercession of our holy patrons, Saint Joseph and Saint Francis Xavier. Amen.

CHAPTER XIX

LAST DAYS AND DEATH OF IRMA

IRMA'S letters clearly reveal that her thoughts turned unceasingly towards heaven, and that to her, death did not seem a separation, but a reunion in her true country. On the feast of the Ascension she wrote to her mother:

How could I refrain from writing you to-day, my dearly loved mother?—to-day when my thoughts are so close to yours, since they are turned towards our Treasure, and our common Treasure is in heaven. I feel so near you, I must talk with you. It is true that you know what I would say, for your thoughts, like mine, are directed towards our beautiful country. Oh! why does Jesus not take us with Him? Why does He still leave us on earth? Our turn will come; yet a little time to suffer for Him, and then He will take us, as He took my father. To-day our loved one is there with Him—have this confidence, my mother; it will please Our Lord. The more we hope in Him, the more we honor His Heart.

Notwithstanding her longing for heaven, Irma would not without the consent of her superior have asked God to shorten her life. "Mother," she said a few days before her sister came to America, "when Elvire will be here I hope you will permit me to go." As we might suppose, consent was not granted, and she was forbidden to renew her request.

Nothing seemed to announce her approaching end when the time came for God to hear, if not her prayers

at least her desires. On the contrary, at the beginning of January, 1856, her health, always so delicate, seemed better than usual. One of the Sisters who had been absent a considerable time congratulated her on her animation and good appearance. "It is many years since I have felt as well as I do now," Irma replied; "I do not know what will happen in the future, but God knows."

Yes, God knew that after the lapse of only a few days the end would come for her. Sister Mary Joseph will give us the details of the sudden illness and last moments of the one so dear to her:

Feb. 2, 1856.

Tuesday, January the twenty-second, Sister Saint Francis came down several times to watch me paint. She even went into the court, and I think she must have caught cold, for the next morning she was seized with violent rheumatic pains. She suffered tortures. The Saturday following she wished to go to confession, and to receive Holy Communion as Viaticum since her weakness would not permit her to fast.

When I returned from Mass on Monday, the twenty-eighth, Mother said to me, "My daughter, I find my dear Sister Saint Francis dangerously ill. I fear she cannot recover." To beg her cure the novices continued all day in prayer in the chapel. By turns, without interruption, they recited the Rosary for our dear patient. After some hours of suspense, her condition gave hope, and for the first time in six days we were able to move her.

A little later when I happened to be alone with her she began to hold sweet converse with Our Lord. Though I was behind an armchair I could hear her tender sighs: "O Jesus, my Jesus, I love You! O my sweet Jesus, how much I love You!" I thought to myself, Now, my dear little Sister, I shall find out how you make your meditation. After all, it will not be difficult, if you always repeat the same thing. But it

was not the words,—Oh no!—it was the tone with which she pronounced them. And when she began again even more vehemently, "Jesus, O my Jesus! Jesus, my love!" I went near the fireplace to hide my tears, asking Our Lord whether He did not hear her. Our Sister Infirmarian entered the room, and I noticed that during the ten minutes she remained Sister Saint Francis Xavier was silent; but as soon as she had gone her loving strain recommenced: "Jesus, my Jesus, how good You are! Jesus, You know I love You as much as I am able to love! O my God! if this is earth, what will heaven be? O Our Lady of La Salette, I love you!"

Fearing she would fatigue herself by talking so much, I left her to look for Mother Theodore. "O my child!" said Mother, "I am very uneasy. Sister Saint Francis says she is well, very well, and yet her pulse is so quick that if I did not know how nervous she is I would have her receive Extreme Unction." "But, Mother," I replied, "perhaps Our Lord wishes to work a miracle. When *you* are sick, she prevents you from dying!" "Who of us has her faith to save her? Alas!" sighed Mother, "do you not see God has inspired her with the belief that she is well, so that she will not ask Him for a cure which He would not refuse her? She is ripe for Heaven."

Mother Theodore said that the crises during which Sister Saint Francis yielded to her transports of love could be called ecstasies; they disclosed the treasures of love shut up in Irma's heart and reminded the beholders of what she herself had written at her father's death: "For souls in their agony Our Lord has consolations unknown in other circumstances of life."

In the "Memoirs" written by Mother Cecilia, who had lived fourteen years of her religious life with Sister Saint Francis, we read: "I took my turn to pass the night with her. Shortly after midnight she became appar-

ently unconscious. Alarmed, I ran in haste to call Mother, who came immediately. She found her very low but not dying. She spoke softly to her of heaven and of Our Lord. Though Sister was motionless she heard what was said, and suddenly her face became perfectly white and her countenance assumed an angelic expression. She smiled, ravished with joy. I exclaimed, 'O Mother, how beautiful!' After about a minute or two the expression died away, but so imperceptibly that its beams of celestial beauty withdrew as light vanishes at fall of day. Whenever I think of it, I cannot help associating it with the Transfiguration of Our Lord."

Sister Mary Joseph's recital continues:

That same evening, Monday, I retired to take a little rest. About ten o'clock Sister Julia, who was watching by Irma during the night, hurried to my room calling out, "Quick! quick! come, Sister Saint Francis is much worse." Trembling, I went and found her,—O my mother!—with joined hands raised towards heaven, crying aloud: "I believe, O my God! I believe; You have said it! How great is the happiness reserved for those who love You! I believe, my God, I believe! I am in heaven!—I am in heaven!" She raised her voice as she uttered these words. I said to myself: Her heart will break; she is going to die. "I see God! I see God! Oh! how beautiful! I see God!" "There now, my dear Sister," I said to her, "adore Him in silence." But she did not hear me. "I am in God; all is in God!—O my good Mother!—O Mary, how beautiful you are! . . . O my God," she said suddenly, "if such is Your will that I return to earth to begin again to live, to suffer, to die for Your love, I consent, my God. Where You wish and as You wish; but I am to go to heaven! I believe, I believe!" Fearing she would exhaust herself, Mother bade her be silent. I remained watching beside her. Once or twice she said

to me, "May I speak? Have I permission?" I told her if it were not absolutely necessary to speak, it would be better to keep silence. She did so.

On Tuesday about five o'clock [in the morning] she sent me for Mother. When Mother entered the room Irma said to her, "Sister Mary Joseph wanted me to keep silence, but I could not. I saw God and heaven. Oh! how beautiful it was!" As I entered at this moment she said to me, "You will come too, Elvire, but not yet."

It was the feast of Saint Francis de Sales [January 29.] I offered my Communion for our dear sick Sister. An interior voice said to me, Will you not ask Extreme Unction for your Sister? she was so attentive to have others receive the Last Sacraments. We sent for Father Corbe and he proposed to anoint her. "No, Father," she replied, "I am quite well again." But understanding later that Mother considered her dangerously sick, she herself asked for Extreme Unction. I embraced her and gave her a large crucifix, on which she had made her contract with Our Lord promising Him to work and suffer for Him, and receiving the promise of heaven in exchange. Alas! though I found her ill enough to make me think she must die, I nevertheless expected a miracle. She was anointed on Tuesday the 29th.

The next day she asked to speak with Mother. "I told you," she said, "what I saw the other day, but I did not finish. Our Lord called me by my name. Showing me heaven, He said, 'Irma, all this is for you; it shall be yours, but not yet.'" "Ah!" exclaimed Mother, "what joy! You will not leave us, then, my dear child?" "Yes, He said to me, 'You will stay a day or two longer, and then heaven will be yours forever.'"

She continued to repeat, "Forever, O my God! and for so little! for so little! So much happiness for so little!" In the moments of her greatest sufferings she would become calm as soon as Mother pronounced the name of Jesus. "O my Jesus," she would repeat, "how

good You are! It is You, it is You, Yourself, O my God, who come to console me, to sustain me! How happy I am! Heart of my Jesus, how happy I am!"

On Wednesday, January 30, she said to me, "I am suffering much; I believe I am going to die. My poor dear novices! I am not able to speak to them, and I had so much to say. And our dear little girls of the Academy, poor children!" This was the only time she spoke of her death, and it passed like a flash.

On Thursday she became so weak that our Mother assembled the community and recited the prayers for the agonizing. For a little time she seemed better, but soon the exhaustion returned. All the Sisters came in turn to give her the last embrace. They placed in her hands her crucifix and the formula of her Vows. All this time I held her in my arms and Mother recited the prayers. About two o'clock in the afternoon she turned her dying eyes toward Heaven, and I was still waiting for her last sigh when Mother Theodore said *De profundis!*

Elvire adds:

Despite these numerous sorrows, my dear mother, I have never ceased to be happy—yes, happy to have left you, to have come to America to take care of my dear Sister Saint Francis, and to be the representative of the family near her; happy especially to have heard escaping from her lips those torrents of divine love which, like burning lava, issued from her inflamed heart. She had asked for me the love of sufferings, and you may well believe that the sweet resignation I experience all the time could not but come from on High.

It was I who closed her eyes. Even after death she was still beautiful. Her face was sweet and composed. In her clasped hands she held the formula of her vows. At her feet we placed a wreath of white roses. All the pupils and villagers came to see her, even the non-Catholics having asked to share in this favor.

Mother Theodore has had a hemorrhage of the lungs.

Although she told me a few days ago that she would soon follow Sister Saint Francis, I remain calm in the hands of God.

A few days later Mother Theodore wrote to Madame le Fer:

February, 1856.

I can hardly believe that she has gone. I am, as it were, under the influence of a painful dream. We all experience the same feeling. This blow, so terrible for all our Sisters, is doubly so for me, and it seems impossible for me to survive her. I cannot express what I feel.

Night and day she is present in my mind, but the thought of her does not distract, does not draw away from God; on the contrary, it seems to elevate my thoughts above the things of earth. Never did this world appear so little and its affairs so unworthy to occupy a heart made for God alone. The effect caused by her holy death is remarkable. She still continues to make Our Lord loved. I should like to send you some of the letters we have received during the last two weeks.

All who knew her have almost reproached themselves for praying for her. To pray for one who was so devoted to Our Lord, they say, whose whole life, at least for the last sixteen years, was but one continual act of love, seems an injury to Him. Love broke the bonds that held her soul captive. As I said before, it was an excess of love that caused her death. But what a death! Oh! no; it is not death; rather it is the beginning of true life.

What glory for you, Madame, to be the mother of a saint, of a saint of the first order, for she is, I am sure, very high in the kingdom of heaven. She prays for you there, for God knows how much she loves you. It is said in the world that religious do not know any longer how to love. This is a great mistake. I am sure that among all your good and devoted children,

there is not one heart more devoted than was your dear Irma's. Is there another that possesses the same power of loving? I doubt it very much. During the thirty-one years that I have been a superior, I have not found another heart like that of my dear Irma, my well-beloved sister, my first daughter, my dear Sister Saint Francis Xavier.

All our Sisters are animated with renewed zeal to continue the work that this dear child was so eager to see prosper and to labor for which she was willing to postpone her entrance into heaven, which Jesus had shown her to be so beautiful. No one is a better imitator of our blessed Sister than dear Sister Mary Joseph. She does not possess the same tenderness of feeling, but hers is a soul of great strength; she will accomplish untold good in the house of God. She is my great solace and I try to be hers.

Towards the end of the year Reverend Father Corbe, the ecclesiastical superior of the community, wrote to Madame le Fer:

It is easy to understand how much you love to speak of our saintly Sister Francis Xavier, your dearly beloved Irma, and to hear others speak of her. Nature indeed claimed for her all your maternal affection, but in addition, the qualities of her mind, her rare talents, her pure soul, her noble heart, made her loved by all who knew her. For a long time we by our prayers contended for her with Heaven. But alas! too soon, according to our human views, has the Divine Spouse taken to Himself the one whom He cherished and enriched with so many graces. Her spirit, however, remains with us and continues to animate the companions she has left.

Her memory will live long at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. I myself shall never forget her. I speak to her, and I seem to hear her answer. Thus I pass my days, in an illusion, no doubt, but it is an illusion productive of good. It recalls her in a lively manner to

my mind, and the remembrance always excites to virtue, to the love of God and the desire of Heaven.

Sister Eudoxie, Mistress of Novices at Ruillé, tells Irma's sisters at Saint Servan that she appreciates their kind thoughtfulness:

I received with holy respect the blessed veil of my dear Sister Saint Francis. I regard it as a relic. My memory faithfully retains the many occasions of edification she gave us while among us, and I love to repeat them to my novices in order to animate them to fervor and love of duty. Never since I am mistress of novices have I come across a soul so strong, so generous, and, I may add, so privileged. I hope she does not forget on high the interest I had in her, and that she will aid me in the fulfillment of an office of which she herself knows the difficulties.

In announcing to the community by a Letter Circular the death of Sister Saint Francis, Mother Theodore says:

You do not expect me, my dear daughters, to write a eulogy of her whom we have so many reasons to regret; of her whose absence leaves such a void in the community. Her name alone suffices to bring to mind all that is sweetest, purest, and most effective in virtue. She was to those who knew her the ideal of religious perfection. Not only had we unanimously considered her the saint of our community, but persons of the world, even those of a different faith, could not behold her angelic countenance without being led to the thought of God. Her death was the echo of her life; or rather it was the bursting forth of a volcano of love. During her lifetime the divine fire with which her heart burned sent forth only sparks; but when the near prospect of heaven had taken away that reserve which caused this humble soul to hide its treasures, or better, when her heart was no longer able to contain its ardent love, a torrent of burning exclamations es-

caped from her lips with such vehemence that it would seem enough to break the feeble bonds which united her soul to her body. In calling upon Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, her voice was so full of love and her countenance so celestial that she appeared to belong no more to earth; she was already in heaven. I understood that this fruit of the garden of the Spouse had reached full maturity and that He wished to gather it in. I saw that I must immolate my Isaac, and consent to be separated from her, who, firm as a rock, had always supported me in my trials; from her, who, notwithstanding the immense distance which separated us (for she was a saint) had always blended her existence with mine. I made the sacrifice of her,—O my God! without a moment's hesitation; for who am I to resist Thee? But Thou knowest that the deep wound it has made in my heart will be healed only when I shall be reunited to her in that heaven which she beheld so beautiful in dying.

We shall all have the happiness of rejoining her, my dear Sisters, if we are faithful to follow her example; if we fulfill perfectly our holy obligations, which are the same as hers were. We are devoted to the same Spouse; we expect the same recompense; let the remembrance of our cherished Sister Saint Francis encourage us in the combat. As for her, so for us; the day of triumph will arrive very soon.

Although we have the sweet hope that our dear Sister is in heaven, we will nevertheless conform to the spirit of Holy Church and to our Constitutions; therefore, do not fail to fulfill punctually for our departed one what is prescribed by our holy Rule for the deceased Sisters. Yes, our beloved, our saintly Sister Saint Francis has gone to heaven, to heaven where she already lived while on earth, for she found it on our holy altar with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, who was her delight, her life, her happiness, her all. Oh! how happy she is now, possessing her God without fear of losing Him. She was already so happy to serve Him on earth!

To one of the Sisters who had been a novice under Sister Saint Francis, Mother Theodore wrote:

All the elect die in the love of God, but it is the privilege of few to die of love of God. Love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was so strong in our dear Sister that it broke the bonds which united her soul to her delicate body; and to die of love of God is the surest way of going straight to Him. It is true, my dear Sisters, that I feel very keenly the loss I have sustained. I could not present to Our Lord any one who was so dear to me as was my beloved Sister Saint Francis; but she was truly too pure, too holy, too much inflamed with the love of God to remain with us any longer. O how little, how small I feel in thinking of my dear and beloved Sister Saint Francis! I am glad you have written to poor Sister Mary Joseph. She has been admirable in her sacrifice. I can tell you, she has a strong and great soul. I pray Our Lord to give you the spirit of our beloved Sister Saint Francis.

In another letter of Mother Theodore, we find these words:

It will be good to die as Sister did, but for that we must live as she lived. She did not think even once that she had to be judged. She heard her Jesus, her chaste and beloved Spouse, calling her by her name, and she listened to Him with unbounded love, and without the least fear.

In notifying Father Gleizal, S. J., of their bereavement, Mother Theodore says:

It costs a great deal, my venerated Father, to say *Thy will be done, my God.* Yes, it costs much to lose a subject like Sister Saint Francis Xavier. You can realize it, for you knew that heart all on fire with love of God. You knew with what zeal she labored to form Jesus in the hearts of others. During the fifteen years

of her life at Saint Mary's we saw her walk with a firm step in the constant practice of perfection, without ever relaxing or showing those vicissitudes of good and bad days so common among persons of our own age. She was always a fervent religious, and I dare say it to you, Father, the most perfect I have ever known. We were always obliged to hold her back with the curb of obedience, which virtue she practiced most perfectly.

To a very devoted friend, Father Benoit of Fort Wayne, Mother Theodore wrote, making allusion to the grave illness from which she herself had but recently recovered:

I must thank you for your very true, very cordial sympathy. Yes, I believe you share in the sorrows and consolations of my heart; I feel it.

It is true that a victim was required, and could, even ought, to be immolated at Saint Mary's. One was therefore brought to the altar, the Angel of Death had his arm raised; he was about to strike, but the victim was rejected. Only for a very short time, however, a time given her through divine mercy to prepare herself. Pray, oh pray, that she may profit by it. Sister Saint Francis was necessary to my existence, and for nothing in the world would she have given me the sorrow of seeing her die; but the sacrifice of being resigned to live for the glory of God and the good of those she loved in Him cost her much more than dying. To live separated from God was her greatest sacrifice and her most intense desire was to be united to Him.

Nevertheless she was too generous, and thought too little of herself to ask God to hasten her death. During one of those crises to which one could well give the name of ecstasies, she believed herself in heaven. She enjoyed the ineffable happiness of the celestial abode; this showed on her countenance—she looked like an angel. She said to Our Lord: "No, my Jesus, not yet; let me make You loved on earth, let me suffer for

You. You know I am ready for the love of You, even to go to hell, provided I could there love You." We heard those words falling from her lips in her loving rapture, but we did not hear what her Beloved answered her. Thirty-eight hours before she died she told me that Our Lord had said to her: "You will remain to suffer a day or two longer and then you will come and be with me in Paradise forever." This word "forever" was so deeply engraved in her soul with the thought of heaven, that she repeated it twenty or thirty times in succession with the holy name of Jesus.

She told me something which I entrust to you as a secret; it was that I should soon follow her. Oh! if I could really follow her! But no, never shall I have her virtue, never shall I love as she loved. Ask for me the grace to do penance and to bear joyfully and lovingly the loss of my cherished daughter, so as to be less unworthy of her.

CHAPTER XX

DEATH OF MOTHER THEODORE—SISTER MARY JOSEPH, MISTRESS OF NOVICES—DEATH OF SISTER MARY JOSEPH

WE must not leave Saint Mary-of-the-Woods without adding some lines to the memory of Mother Theodore, the devoted friend and tender spiritual mother of Sister Saint Francis Xavier, and to their beloved Elvire, Sister Mary Joseph. At the death of Sister Saint Francis, it will be remembered, the good superior confided to Father Benoit Irma's prophecy that she was to follow soon, and God did not prolong the separation of the two whom He had so closely united on earth. About two months after the death of Irma Mother Theodore was seized with a serious and very painful illness. She saw death approaching but it caused her no fear. Even in the throes of a long agony she remained peaceful, and as her daughters were pained to see her sufferings continue, she said to them, "The time is very short, my dear children, compared to eternity."

During those weeks of uneasiness and anguish the pious religious had hoped to move heaven, as they had often done before, to obtain of Our Lord the preservation of so precious a life; but her time of trial was ended. The day of repose and recompense had at last arrived. May 14, 1856, God called to Himself His faithful servant, and reunited her to her Irma and to all her cherished daughters who had preceded her. This loss,

so afflicting to all the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, was especially so to Sister Mary Joseph, who had bestowed upon Mother Theodore all the affection she had once given to Irma. But the death of God's chosen ones leaves in the depths of souls surviving them a source of strength and consolation. This is an essential of sanctity, that it leaves its impress on the earth where it acquired its perfection. Where the saints pass, God passes with them.

"It was not grief that caused the death of our cherished Mother," wrote Elvire to her family; "do not think so. No, no; her soul was too great, too generous, not to sacrifice to God her dearest daughter. The grace of God is more powerful than human nature is weak. 'Though my heart palpitates at the least contradiction, I did not feel it beat at all at the death of my dear Sister Saint Francis Xavier. It suffers much, but it does not throb,'—this Mother herself said to me with astonishment."

Father Corbe again wrote to Madame le Fer:

For fifteen years God has made us pass through many tribulations; blows seemed to fall all about us; but this time His strokes have penetrated even to the heart's core. The death of our dear Sister Saint Francis was but the beginning of the sacrifice He was going to require from us. He has not struck us in His wrath, however, for the two victims whom He has chosen were capable, rather, of opening the treasures of His mercies. But, considered from a human point of view our loss is irreparable. Great, indeed, was the grief of all the Sisters on the 14th of May, about four o'clock in the morning, when I entered Mother Theodore's room and found them on their knees, crushed, as it were, by the stroke which had bowed them down. They turned toward me as if for consolation. Alas! I had none to give. Were they not doubly orphans?

Ever since I had known Mother Theodore and Irma, I had seen them zealous, yet always ingenious in smoothing over the difficulties of the religious life for their daughters—the one, the good superior removing the thorns and briars on the way, and fearing not to be wounded herself in order to spare her daughters sufferings; the other, culling gayly the smallest flowers which budded in their path—often a little rough—and showing their charms and perfumes to her novices. Both of them, though different in disposition, accomplished the same end. Both, too, had the same sufferings; they desired them, and their delight was, as they said, to be on the cross with their Savior. This good Master consoled both with delights so extraordinary as to be considered foretastes of heaven.

Nothing could be more beautiful than the death of these two holy religious. One would have said they had fallen into a sweet and peaceful slumber while caressed by rays of divine light. Such is the destiny of the elect. The evening of a good life touches the aurora of heaven. Those whom we so regret are not lost to the community. They pray for Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, and it is doubtless to their intercession we owe the choice made at the elections, the good dispositions of the Sisters, and the excellent spirit existing among them.

Sister Saint Francis Xavier was succeeded in the important office of Mistress of Novices by Sister Mary Joseph. Gifted with a generous heart, Elvire had consecrated herself unreservedly to God, so that the death of Sister Saint Francis and of Mother Theodore far from weakening her courage, seemed rather to give her new strength. Until then she had only to listen, and to retain the wise counsels of a mistress skilled in the guidance of souls; now, vested with the spirit of a new Eliseus, Sister Mary Joseph brought to the novitiate the treasures of a cultured mind, a heart inflamed with divine love, and a soul capable of the most heroic sacri-

fice. She applied herself with her whole being to making those entrusted to her care true and faithful spouses of our Lord Jesus Christ. For twelve years she remained in charge of the novices, and was then elected first assistant to the Superior-General, an office she held until her death, December 12, 1881.

When the life of Sister Saint Francis was first published Sister Mary Joseph was nearing the end of her exile. Her last work was that of the English translation, but she passed away before its completion. Concerning her wishes, Madame Corbinière, in a later work, entitled "L'Indiana," says:

"She exacted of her Sisters in religion that nothing should be said of her after her death in that translation. 'I can exact this promise from you, but from my sisters in France I cannot; they would disobey me.' Yes, dear and beloved sister, you well knew that in a certain sense we would disobey you; yet, she who writes these pages conforms to your desires, as she feels that you hold her pen and her heart in check when they wish to portray on paper your many virtues. You smile at her affection for you, but you enjoy her lack of power, and you rejoice at having hidden from the gaze of the world so many good and beautiful acts which are known to and regarded by God alone. You compel the hand that pens these words, and which would wish to do more, to say simply, that of all the flowers which beautify the garden of the Divine Gardener, the humble violet is the one which yields the most exquisite perfume. With Irma's crucifix pressed to her lips, Elvire's soul passed away. Her last words were a résumé of her life of abnegation, obedience, and humility."

In accepting the dedication of "L'Indiana," Mon-

seigneur Sebaux, Bishop of Angoulême, wrote to the author: "The Very Reverend Mother Mary Lecor, Superior General of Ruillé-sur-Loir, once said to me, 'Sister Saint Francis Xavier was indeed destined to be an apostle. A soul of fire, she inflamed all with whom she came in contact.' Could she have paid her a more beautiful tribute? The same words can be equally applied to Sister Mary Joseph, her sister and disciple, whose saintly life you have just written."

We cannot refrain from adding at the present day, that all the hopes and expectations of our beloved Mother Theodore concerning Sister Mary Joseph were fully realized. The twenty-nine years that she was spared to the community were years of heroic devotedness and shining example. She transmitted the spirit and faithfully conserved the holy teachings received from her angelic sister and the holy Foundress, and she justly shares in the veneration in which they are held.

The remains of the two sisters were interred side by side in the community cemetery, their graves being marked by simple wooden crosses. There they rested until December 3, 1907, when they were translated to the crypt of the conventual church; and here they repose —Sister Saint Francis Xavier and Sister Mary Joseph —one on each side of the venerated foundress, their beloved Mother Theodore.

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